

THE USES OF TRADITION

A COMPARATIVE ENQUIRY INTO THE NATURE,
USES AND FUNCTIONS OF ORAL POETRY IN
THE BALKANS, THE BAL TIC, AND AFRICA

EDITED BY

MICHAEL BRANCH
AND
CELIA HAWKESWORTH



School of Slavonic and East European Studies
University of London
Finnish Literature Society, Helsinki

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SSEES Occasional Papers No. 26

ISBN: 0 903425 38 6

Finland
ISBN: 951 717 842 5

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FOREWORD

The momentous developments that we have witnessed in the last four years as first the former Soviet Union and then, more recently, Yugoslavia started the process of fragmentation into groups of smaller independent nation-states, can have left few of us in any doubt about the potency of concepts such as national identity and ethnicity. Fundamental social and political changes in South Africa underline that potency, and throw a stark light on the daunting need to understand national identity and ethnicity: both what they are and what they are perceived to be.

Among the myriad of factors that go into the shaping of a sense of identity and ethnicity is oral tradition. To state that is scarcely new. Ever since Johann Gottfried Herder's (1744-1803) work at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the association of identity with a local language, often without a literary form, and the cultural tradition conveyed through that language have been a powerful force in re-drawing the map of the world. What is less widely known — though it may seem a commonplace to anthropologists and specialists in the comparative study of early literature — are other uses and functions of oral tradition that date back to times long before Herder and can be strikingly universal in their nature and applicability. Such uses and functions can vary from the accompaniment to ritual activity or the maintenance of kin or village identity to the development of an aesthetic expressiveness reconcilable with the criteria of literature in the great tradition.

The aim of the present book is to set out the diversity of uses and functions and to attempt to see them both from the point of view of the creators and performers of oral tradition on the one hand and from that of those who have come from outside the tradition — be they poets, scholars or politicians — on the other. The starting point is the tradition of the South Slavs and the Serbian collector and scholar, Vuk Stefanović Karadžić (1787-1864). The association with Karadžić is both opportune and intentional. Opportune because the chapters in this book were assembled from thirty-four papers presented at a symposium commemorating the bicentenary of Karadžić's birth, entitled 'The Study of Oral Tradition and the South Slavs' and held at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies in the University of London in July 1987 (the remaining papers are appearing in a separate volume concerned with textual study). Intentional because of all the great nineteenth-century folklorist-politicians none exerted so enormous an

influence as Karadžić on the collection and codification of other oral cultures or on the literary tradition of his day. In the twentieth century, his continuing influence can be seen in the way it has set in motion the creation of a powerful school of scholarship associated first and foremost with the names of Milman Parry and Albert Bates Lord. Albert Lord was appropriately the patron of the symposium commemorating Karadžić and is himself, fittingly, the subject of this book's epilogue.

The choice of the South Slav tradition and of the persona of Karadžić provides a well-documented context for this enquiry. Collected and published at a critical phase in his country's liberation from the Ottomans, Karadžić's work went on to become a touchstone both for art and national identity. A similar phenomenon, though with much variation in detail, occurs in the wake of Karadžić's work in various other parts of the world. In this book we have considered Finland for the purposes of elaborating certain related features; the Baltic States would offer similar examples. Karadžić's contemporary and counterpart in Finland, Elias Lönnrot (1802-84), was familiar with Karadžić's work, and almost certainly influenced by it. Similarly, Lönnrot's work provided inspiration for art, politics and scholarship. Moreover much of present-day research into oral tradition derives ultimately from the scholarly heritage of these two men. We have looked to Africa for insights into the ways in which oral poetry can function in societies in crisis. In their consideration of formulaic and prosodic affinities the contributors to this book have drawn comparisons not only with literature and tradition in the Balkans but far beyond including Western Europe and Asia.

In his important work, *The Epic in the Making* (1980), Koljević has given an eloquent account of the way in which the Serbian epic tradition functioned, at a particular historical moment, as a means of a nation's interpretation of its past. Karadžić made his collections at a time when the Serbs were engaged in an ultimately successful process of liberation from Ottoman rule. On the one hand this gave the songs in Karadžić's collection a particular coherence, so that they form an aesthetic whole despite their fragmented nature. In addition, it invested them with a consistent point of view, centred on what may be called the 'myth of Kosovo'. Through the instrument of the oral epic tradition, the defeat of the Serbs by the Ottoman forces on the field of Kosovo in 1389 has become the single most important fact of their history. One of the main tasks of the tradition was to enable the Serbian people to come to terms with the fact of defeat and the humiliation of living under foreign occupation. The success with which this was achieved represents a remarkable triumph of the human spirit. The core of the myth is the notion that defeat was the consequence of a deliberate choice between short-lived victory in the 'earthly kingdom' and eternal life in the 'heavenly kingdom'. In a remarkable song entitled 'The Downfall of the

Serbian Empire', Tsar Lazar makes the choice, urging his followers to build 'a church of silk' on the field of Kosovo. The dignity and self-confidence conveyed by such a sense of moral superiority against impossible odds has undoubtedly been a source of inspiration and inner strength throughout the history of the Serbs, and especially in times of crisis. There is a well-worn anecdote about a group of soldiers in the First World War claiming that they were led into battle by Prince Marko, and it is hard not to see a reflection of the spirit of defiance that informs the whole epic tradition in the partisan resistance in the Second World War. As several of the chapters in this book demonstrate, the songs that grew out of this tradition have contributed not only to the wealth of the cultural heritage of the language in which they were composed, but have enriched the sum of our common European culture. The power of an oral tradition, such as that of the South Slavs, to forge and nurture a sense of community in the face of oppression, offers a vivid illustration of the vital role of the imagination in safeguarding enduring values.

It seems, however, that just as the building of fortress towns such as Skadar on the Bojana was seen in the tradition as an endeavour of such importance that it demanded human sacrifice, so too may every great achievement of the human spirit be seen to have its price. A tradition which includes the function of fostering a nation's sense of itself in opposition to others entails also a tendency to insist on the superior values of that nation. The impulse stems from the threat of dominance or oppression by alien forces whose numerical and physical superiority must be countered by conviction of moral superiority. Such a tradition, growing out of a spirit of resistance, is by definition exclusive. The South Slav tradition, as reflected in the collections of Karadžić, vividly illustrates the will to resistance and the strength deriving from inner conviction. It is possible to refer to the broad tradition, above all perhaps to the songs about Prince Marko who represents what Koljević has eloquently expressed as 'The spirit of limited defiance', as constituting a common South Slav heritage. But the distinctive beauty and power of the Kosovo songs are specifically Serbian. As was undoubtedly the case at the time of their collection in a period of insurgence, the sense of historical destiny the songs conveyed constituted a powerful weapon of resistance to oppressive rule. Once formulated, the tradition and its accompanying mythology may be summoned to serve a variety of purposes. The power of national mythology is nowhere so obvious as in times of war when it may be galvanized to send young men to their deaths and turned into an irresistible weapon of destruction against that nation's immediate neighbours.

The *leitmotif* of this book is the interplay and resonance between the local and the universal and for this reason we have divided the chapters into five parts. The first examines the impact of the South Slav tradition in the broadest sense, giving consideration both to the creative

process and to the reception of that tradition elsewhere in the world. The second part looks at how scholars closest to the South Slav tradition view the tradition today and the way in which Karadžić shaped it. Their approach, and that of the authors in the third part — ‘The Comparative Dimension’ — who all come from outside the South Slav tradition, demonstrates the universality of theme, genre, composition, performance and poetics of the South Slav materials and comparable poetry in many other parts of the world. An essential aspect of the universality that runs through this part of the book is the way in which insights from one tradition offer ways of understanding another tradition. In the last two parts of the book, the contributors turn from poetics, composition and reception to consider social and political questions. In the fourth part, the emphasis falls on the ways in which oral tradition is employed to create a sense of cultural and national identity, a process to which authors in several other parts of the book also allude. Appropriately, the last part is concerned with three societies where oral tradition remains alive and productive. In all three cases, the practitioners of the tradition continue consciously to maintain a strong aesthetic sensibility, while in the two examples from Africa this sensibility is combined with a vigorous political purpose.

In concluding this Foreword we should like to thank the British Council, the Ford Foundation (through the good offices of the British Association for Soviet, Slavonic and East European Studies), Rank/Xerox and the International Association for South-East European Studies for their generous support of the Karadžić bicentenary symposium without which this book would not have been written.

Bloomsbury

Celia Hawkesworth
Michael Branch
August 1994

PART ONE

THE IMPACT OF THE SOUTH SLAV
TRADITION

Chapter One

The impact of Vuk Karadžić on the tradition: the importance for Homer

ALBERT B. LORD

If it were not for the collections made and inspired by Vuk Stefanović Karadžić in the early nineteenth century, it is unlikely that the comparison of the Homeric poems with those gathered from the tradition of South Slav oral epic would have gone beyond the most general type of statements.¹ Since the Homeric poems are recordings of pure traditional texts in both style and content, a body of songs that belonged to a pure oral tradition, Karadžić and his successors, in providing the scholarly world with purely traditional texts, as well, of course, as with some transitional and some non-traditional ones, made possible a meaningful approach to the problem of how the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were composed and transmitted as oral traditional poems.

In the 1930s, Milman Parry's work was concerned mainly with the style of the Homeric poems and with that of the South Slav poetry, but his interests went far deeper than the outward forms of style. As a student of Renan, he was seriously intent on describing that particular way of life of a people that produced poetry with a particular kind of content expressed in a particular kind of style.² For his part, Karadžić, as a historian, fascinated by the events of his day and aware of their importance for the Serbs as well as for the rest of Europe, was, consciously or unconsciously, recording both their past and their present as it was related by traditional singers. Unlike his predecessors, who told us little or nothing about the singers from whom they wrote down their songs, Karadžić paid some attention to the traditional singers

¹ Before him, Andrija Kačić-Miošić in the eighteenth century in his *Razgovor ugodni naroda slovinskoga* (Venice, 1756) had written poems in the style of oral traditional poetry, but, because they were not pure traditional texts, they were not reliable for the kind of stylistic analysis needed for a comparison with the Homeric poems. Kačić might have importance for the study of transitional texts such as some of those that have come down to us from the Middle Ages. Even to understand a transitional text one must know as much as possible about the pure tradition from which it derived.

² For more see his articles: 'Studies in the Epic Technique of Oral Verse-Making, I: Homer and the Homeric Style' (*Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, No. 41, 1930, pp. 73-147) and 'Studies in the Epic Technique of Oral Verse-Making II: The Homeric Language as the Language of an Oral Poetry' (*ibid.*, No. 43, 1932, pp. 1-50).

themselves, not just as transmitters of narratives but as creators.

It was in that vein that Karadžić had asked Filip Višnjić to create songs about the Serbian uprising against the Turks. In accord with the ideas of his time Karadžić was more interested in the historical events themselves and in the phenomenon of 'improvising' a new song on contemporary happenings than in either the detailed process of composition of the songs or the tradition itself as an entity.

Parry sought in the South Slav oral traditional epic a model for the investigation of the way in which that kind of epic was composed and transmitted in order to understand better the compositional techniques of the singer Homer in the Ancient Greek tradition. Thoroughly acquainted with the style of the Homeric poems and convinced that they could not have been invented by a single person but must be traditional songs formed by many singers over a long period of time, he wished to determine in as great detail as was possible how the art of traditional narrative sung poetry was practised by singers and handed on from one generation to another.

In his proposal to the American Council of Learned Societies in 1933 for the funding of an expedition to collect oral epic poetry in Yugoslavia he wrote:

The knowledge of the processes of an oral poetry can be had up to a certain point by the logical analysis of a style (as I have done in the case of the Homeric poems), but a really complete knowledge can be had only by accumulating from a living oral poetry a body of experimental texts sought after in accordance with a fixed plan.

The plan should include ways to show several goals or problems, among which he listed the following ten:

- a) to what extent an oral poet who composes a new poem is dependent upon the traditional poetry as a whole for his phraseology, his scheme of composition, and the thought of his poem;
- b) to what extent a poem, original or traditional, is stable in successive recitations of a given singer;
- c) how a poem is changed in a given locality over a number of years;
- d) how it is changed in the course of its travels from one region to another;
- e) in what ways a given poem travels from one region to another, and the factors, political, geographical, and so on, which determine the spread of the poetry;
- f) the different sources of the material from which a given heroic cycle is created;
- g) the factors determining the creation, growth, and decline of an heroic cycle;
- h) the relation of the events of an historical cycle to the actual events, and the nature of the differences;
- i) the nature of the talent in an oral poet;
- j) role of the people and of the individual in the creation of a poem.

The above list is an amazing document in the insight that it affords to Parry's thinking in the autumn of 1933, after a summer of collecting

mainly in Hercegovina, about what he would like to find out from the South Slav collections that would be useful for his investigations of the Homeric poems. For example, we learn that he was interested in the creation of a 'new poem' [a) above]. When he turned to the stability of a poem in successive recitations, he included an 'original' poem together with a traditional one, in order to test whether a traditional poem would be transmitted in the same way as an 'original' one [b) above]. He wanted to find out how a poem 'changes' and 'travels' [c), d) and e) above]. I discovered this document very recently³ and was surprised to find Parry's interest in 'cycles' of poems, because I do not recall his ever mentioning them. He wanted to learn about their 'sources', their 'creation', 'growth' and 'decline' [f), g) and h) above]. Parry was clearly thinking in terms of the Homeric poems and of the Homeric Cycle. Finally — and surprisingly this was not at that time his primary concern — he wanted to know about the 'talent of the oral poet' and the influence of the audience [i) and j) above]. His goals were wide-ranging and sweeping in their implications.

One notices that the question of the length of the Homeric poems did not enter into his thinking at this early stage, because only the Christian songs were known to him, and, although there were a few songs of over a thousand lines, nothing from the South Slav region comparable to the Homeric length had yet come to his attention. During the summer of 1933 Parry had collected from Nikola Vujnović in Dubrovnik, who was a stonemason from a village near Stolac in Hercegovina. He had also gone to hear and gather songs in Stolac himself, and then in Nevesinje and Gacko. He had not yet become acquainted with the songs of the Muslim tradition, except for a not uninteresting Kosovo song from Murat Čustović in Gacko and a song of 'Kajtaž Bajraktar and Captain Dojčić', a version of Bagdad II, from Osman Mekić in Stolac.⁴ This document demonstrates that those who have thought of Parry as being interested only in stylistics have truly misjudged him.

The study of style has, however, been basic to the appreciation of the peculiar qualities of oral traditional literature that account for the differences between it and non-traditional written literature, and a few words about it are needed. Much has been written about the formulas and themes of oral traditional narrative songs, and there is no need for me to repeat it here, but while they are striking and significant, formulas and themes are not the only elements in the kind of oral

³ I am grateful to Mr Cornelius Buttmer of the University of Cork, who found it in the course of indexing the Celtic Collection in Harvard University's Houghton Library and brought it to my attention. It was among the papers of the late Professor Fred Norris Robinson, who had been a member of the committee of the American Council of Learned Societies reviewing Parry's request for funds.

⁴ To the seventy-six songs that he collected in person that summer must be added a number of notebooks sent to him during the following winter and spring from Nevesinje by Milovan Vojičić, and by other singers in the region of Stolac.

traditional style that we find in the South Slav tradition and in the Homeric poems — and in many other oral epic traditions. There are other features that are indispensable as well; to ignore them would be to distort the traditional style beyond recognition. For example, lines are linked to one another in various typical ways. In the formulaic language of oral traditional narrative singers make abundant use of anaphora and epiphora and of internal and end rhyme to bind lines and parts of lines together into couplets or triplets or quatrains through the natural associations of sounds. Moreover, formulas, and themes as well, are interrelated among themselves not only by networks of sound, but also by parataxis, correspondences of structure, such as parallelisms, syntactic and otherwise, and of meaning, that form systems, which, in turn, shape a distinct language. It is a poetic tongue that is different from both the language of ordinary speech and that of 'written', non-traditional poetry, precisely because the elements are defined by their function of making possible the expression of traditional actions, descriptions and concepts within the demands of metrical and rhythmic restraints and rapid performance.

The South Slav living tradition has taught us that an oral tradition of narrative song consists of a very large number of closely interrelated songs. We have learned that a tradition is made up not of discrete songs but of songs, or, preferably, stories about a limited number of heroes, tales that overlap and intertwine, in such a way that in the experience of both the singer and his traditional audience any one traditional song can evoke subconsciously a large group of other songs, or stories, in the tradition.

No matter where one enters the maze of the tradition one eventually comes into contact with all the elements, that is to say, all the stories, parts of stories, themes and clusters of themes, motifs and their clusters; for most of them, if not all, are interrelated. I have spoken often of the weaving style of the formulas. This same term applies to the thematic material, and, on the larger loom, to the story patterns also.

Tales of the capture of cities blend with stories of weddings, because weddings are usually accomplished by bride capture. The song of the 'Capture of Bagdad' is also the 'Wedding of Djerzjelez Alija'; indeed, that was Salih Ugljanin of Novi Pazar's title for his version of the tale. The sultan, too, is wedded to the Queen of Bagdad. Both of those narrative patterns, seige and wedding, may merge easily with accounts of the return of heroes from adventures abroad, to find that their wives are about to marry again, or that a son has been abducted. For example, in the Bagdad song Alija feared that someone would steal his betrothed while he was away, even as Marko Kraljević in the well-known song of 'Prince Marko and Mina of Kostur' feared that Mina might attack his tower while he was away, and abduct his wife. Thus even the element of the return pattern is included in these songs, or rather, in these versions of these songs of campaigns in foreign lands. And so the tradition

emerges as a melting-pot of story elements, or, to return to the earlier image, a tapestry of heroic actions woven on a gigantic loom. One is reminded of the cloth on which are depicted the incidents of the Pabuji or Bagrawa epic in Rajistan, as reported by John D. Smith of Cambridge, that serves as a backdrop for the performance of the stories, the singer indicating which one he has chosen to relate next.

Let me return to Parry's 1933 proposal and his listing of problems. While he was primarily concerned with the workings of a pure living tradition, he was also interested in the life of a tradition, in the way in which it changes, declines and eventually disappears. The collections of Karadžić and others from the nineteenth century as well as the more contemporary ones, like our own, have provided excellent examples of pure traditional texts. But the South Slav epic tradition has also taught us much about *non-traditional* narrative poems written in the same metre as the traditional and at times imitating it, but not belonging to it. Naturally enough there are South Slav poems that are either mixtures of traditional and non-traditional elements or they might even be possibly thought of as *transitional*. It is not always easy to determine the boundaries. Some of Kačić's poems, written by himself, are imitations of the traditional style but they follow the epistolary models of Dubrovnik Renaissance poetry. Such poems belong clearly to non-traditional literature. On the other hand, many of Kačić's poems might well be considered to be traditional, because they use the traditional formulas and themes in a traditional way in stories that are of the traditional type. In such cases the question arises only whether a song has to emanate from a traditional singer and actually to be sung to a traditional audience for it to be considered as fully traditional. One can discuss these problems at great length.

Recently some Homeric scholars have tried to maintain that the Homeric poems are transitional. The songs would then, they say, be those of a great poet making use of the tradition but transcending it, moving presumably in the direction of the non-traditional. There are several reasons for rejecting this well-intentioned proposal. The most telling is that Homer's songs are the first preserved to us in writing. Before them it would appear that there was only oral traditional poetry. Could it be that non-traditional poetry sprang suddenly complete with one stroke of the pen? This is patently and logically impossible, of course. The South Slav model, as well as many others, teaches us that non-traditional poetry develops gradually and usually in response to outside stimuli, for example from contact with an already existing developed non-traditional literature, such as Latin in the Middle Ages in Europe. All of these parallels, as well as common sense, indicate that the traditional elements of style and even the traditional elements of story-patterning persist for a very long time into the non-traditional period. The truly non-traditional literature develops slowly.

We have been able to observe in the living tradition of South Slav

song changes from a purely traditional style to a mixed or transitional one. We also had the opportunity to investigate the significant differences in ability and quality among traditional singers themselves. As long as it was thought that singers were simply handing on songs, that is texts, that they had memorized more or less well from other singers, the singer as a creative poet was ignored. When we saw that songs, that is texts, varied from singer to singer and even from performance to performance, clearly the singer was doing something more than *transmitting* a text. He was obviously creating one. He was telling the story in his own poetic words. He had at some time learned, or was in the process of learning, not only the technique but also the art of 'oral narrative verse-making', to use Parry's phrase. Some singers could practise that art more effectively, more subtly, indeed, than others. The best of them were continually influencing the tradition, expanding it, honing its poetics, leading the way subconsciously to greater ornamentation, a finer sense of humanity, a richer imagery.

In his proposal of autumn 1933 Parry had shown an interest in the talent of the individual poet. He had been fascinated by the singer Milovan Vojičić of Nevesinje, who was literate and could write down his own songs, but who also composed songs. He was intrigued that a singer could make new songs with traditional means.

In the field in Yugoslavia later in the following years Parry continued that interest so vital for the Homeric Question. He wanted to find out what a good singer could do, and he used to ask singers: 'Could a good singer take a song which was not very good and make a good song of it?' The answer, of course, was in the affirmative. And it was true. Avdo Medjedović has left us at least two examples of this phenomenon. We know the text of 'Ženidba Smailagića Meha' (The Wedding of Smailagić Meho) that was read to him and from which he learned the song. Avdo's song has now been published in Serbo-Croat and in English translation. In the introduction to my translation of it I compare Avdo's version with that of Šemić and with other published and unpublished texts.

On one occasion Parry asked Avdo to listen to another singer, a good one, sing a song that Avdo said he had never heard before. He was then asked to sing it. This he did. Appendix I of *The Singer of Tales* contains a comparison of the two texts by sections, presenting first a synopsis of Mumin's song and then Avdo's.⁵ I should like to tell you some of the reasons why Avdo's version is better than Mumin's.

The most obvious difference is in the greater degree of ornamentation in Avdo's version than in Mumin's and the resulting variance in length; Mumin's song has 2294 lines, Avdo's 6313. As one

⁵ Mumin Vlahovljak's song is Parry Text No. 12468 and Avdo's Parry Text 12471; both were sung for recording in August, 1935 (*Singer of Tales*, Cambridge, 1960, pp. 223-34).

compares the two texts, one is aware that Avdo follows Mumin fairly closely, more so than one might have thought, but one also notices from the very beginning the degree of expansion and ornamentation that Avdo uses in his retelling of the story. After the 'pripjev' Avdo devotes twenty lines to a praise of Bosnia in the time of Sulejman the Magnificent. This is a passage that Avdo uses in 'The Wedding of Smailagić Meho' and elsewhere. It is very probable that this is a theme that he has himself developed, and he is fond of it. Next comes his description of the assembly of the aghas and beys of the north. His listing of the men of the Border begins with the same three as did Mumin's and each has the same number of standard-bearers, but Avdo describes each briefly as he is named and he adds five more to their number. Then, as in Mumin's text, he mentions Halil as serving them in their midst. He ends this section with a description of the boasting of the aghas, including their boasts. Here is a bit of it as illustration of his 'catalogue' technique:

Ever they sat comrade by comrade, elder by elder, bey next to bey. In the middle of the circle was Childe Halil. His clothing was gold embroidered on white Venetian velvet; all the seams were covered with gold braid. There were feathers of gold at the young man's forehead, and the falcon's face was clear and bright like that of a white mountain *vila*. His black pigtail lay upon his neck as if a black raven had perched there. Dear God, what an imperial champion! As he gave each man his glass, how respectfully he bowed, that the aghas might find their drink the sweeter; he honoured them.

When the aghas had drunk their wine, and the drink had flushed their faces, they put aside the wine glasses and took up the brandy bowls. When the wine and the brandy mingled, the men of the Border began their boasting: what each had done better than another, what each had earned more than another, who had won the more duels, who had taken the more captives from foreign countries, from Hungary or from Austria, the land of the Emperor, or from the neighbouring land of Italy; who had broadened the border more than another, who had reared the better horse, who had better arms; whose sword was the better, who had brought up the better daughter, or the better sister. One boasted of his daughter, another of his sister; one boasted of his brother's girl.

The aghas were merry and fabulously rich and they enjoyed the favour of the sultan; they needed not to concern themselves with their next repast nor with tax or tribute. Of this they conversed, and of where they had ornamented the imperial walls with booty. Each spoke as he wished. All those aghas were merry and happy.

Some may remember that a passage very much like this one, though not, of course, the same lines, is used in Avdo Medjedović's 'Smailagić Meho' also; it is standard Avdo, and a good measure of his great talent in ornamenting and expanding a theme of the opening of a ceremonial meeting. Not every singer has so extensive a command of descriptive vocabulary. The whole passage from which the above was taken has eighty-seven lines as compared to Mumin's nineteen. The effect of this ornamentation is to add significance to the assembly and to enhance the contrast between the magnificence of the aghas in the gathering and the poverty of the young man at the foot of the assembly near the door.

Only his pistols rival the arms of the others. Such ornamentation is a gauge of the skill and poetic imagination of the individual singer of epic narrative.

What has been the impact on Homeric scholarship of Parry's work and that of those scholars who have tried to evaluate the importance of the South Slav epic as collected and studied by him and others in our search for knowledge about the composition of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*? One should distinguish at the beginning between the influence of the writings about the South Slav oral traditional epic and the effect of the publication of the actual *texts* of the songs collected by Parry and his later students on the thinking of Homeric scholars.⁶

Between Parry's death in 1935 and the appearance of the first volume of *Serbocroatian Heroic Songs* in 1954 there was very little written from the point of view of Homer as an oral poet. Some scholars accepted Parry's ideas, some were sceptical, some feared that the alleged loss of meaning of the fixed epithet would take away some of the value of Homer's poetry. But this concern was there before Parry went to Yugoslavia and was not directly related to the South Slav epic material. The body of poetry had yet to be presented in full detail.⁷ Of the thirty-odd authors listed by John Miles Foley as working with Ancient Greek during that period only about one third were critical in varying degrees of Parry's ideas.⁸

In England C.M. Bowra was among the first to accept Parry's work, but in his 1930 *Tradition and Design in the Iliad*⁹ he made no reference to Parry, whom he had not read at that time, but in his later work he favoured Parry's ideas. His first Parry work was in 1950, 'The Comparative Study of Homer'.¹⁰

With the publication of Volume I of *Serbocroatian Heroic Songs* in 1954 a new period opened, which was to last at least until the appearance in my edition of Avdo Medjedović's *The Wedding of Smailagić Meho* in 1974, but in reality up to the present time. One should note first, however, that during that period and later there were several important works dealing with Homer as an oral poet that had little, if anything, to do with Yugoslav songs. It was during this period, for example, that J.B. Hainsworth began his very valuable writing on

⁶ John Miles Foley, *Oral-formulaic Theory and Research, An Introduction and Annotated Biography*, Garland, 1985; an indispensable tool for the study of the scholarship on the subject; see especially pp. 688-92.

⁷ What was written under the influence of Parry's work derived mainly from his Paris theses and from his writings of the 1930s, especially his two very important articles in *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*.

⁸ Two Yugoslav scholars are included in Foley's bibliography, Stjepan Banović of Zagreb and Miloš Djurić of Belgrade. In 1951 Banović compared thematic subjects in South Slav poetry with the Homeric poems, but I did not find any mention of Parry or of the oral theory. I have not had access to Djurić's article.

⁹ C. M. Bowra, *Tradition and Design in the Iliad*, Oxford, 1930 (reprinted 1968).

¹⁰ *American Journal of Archeology*, 54, 1950, pp. 184-92.

the formula in Homer. His 'The Homeric Formula and the Problem of Transmission' in 1962,¹¹ was the first of his articles on the subject. *The Flexibility of the Homeric Formula* in 1968¹² expanded Parry's concept of the formula and was a significant step forward for the Oral Theory. But the South Slav songs did not enter into Hainsworth's studies. Here also should be mentioned the scrupulous work of A. Hoekstra, beginning in 1954 with his article, 'Une Formule para-homerique', in *Mnemosyne*,¹³ and including his two most impressive books.¹⁴ Bernard Fenik of Cincinnati has made a noteworthy study of the *Typical Battle Scenes in the Iliad: Studies in the Narrative Techniques of Homeric Battle Description*,¹⁵ with an awareness of the importance of typical scenes and themes in oral composition, but with no special reference to the South Slav songs. He continues to be an important voice in the dialogue concerning Homer and oral poetry, as he attempts to reconcile extreme positions. His latest work on *Homer and the Nibelunglied*¹⁶ is an example of that approach. Gregory Nagy's contributions to Homeric studies began in 1973, just before the appearance of 'Smailagić Meho', and owe much to Milman Parry, but they do not make use of the South Slav songs. They have made significant advances in formula definition and in our thinking concerning the formation of the Homeric poems. Of special interest, in addition to his fine book, *The Best of the Achaeans*,¹⁷ is his article in 1980, 'An Evolutionary Model for the Text Fixation of Homeric Epos'.¹⁸

In returning to the effect of the publication in 1954 of Volume 1 of *Serbocroatian Heroic Songs* (hereafter *SCHS*), I should first note that the Serbo-Croat texts themselves do not seem to have had as great an influence as one might have hoped. I have not made a special study of Homeric scholarship in Yugoslavia, but for a variety of reasons, I have the impression that Yugoslav Homerists had paid little attention to the Parry Collection texts until the publication of 'Smailagić Meho' in 1974. Recently, however, I am glad to say, a Yugoslav Classicist, Miroslav Kravar, who was at first negative on the basis of the songs in *SCHS* changed his mind after the appearance of *The Wedding of Smailagić Meho*, as he indicated in a paper that he gave at the meetings of the

¹¹ *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, 9, 1962, pp. 57-68.

¹² Oxford, 1968.

¹³ 4, ser. 7, 154, pp. 297-99.

¹⁴ *Homeric Modifications of Formulaic Prototypes: Studies in the Development of Greek Epic Diction*, Amsterdam, 1964 and *The Sub-Epic Stage of the Formulaic Tradition: Studies in the Homeric Hymn to Apollo, to Aphrodite, and to Demeter*, Amsterdam, 1969.

¹⁵ *Hermes Einzelschriften*, 21, 1968, 256 pp.

¹⁶ *Homer and the Nibelungenlied*, Cambridge, MA, London, 1986.

¹⁷ *The Best of the Achaeans: Concepts of the Hero in Archaic Greek Poetry*, Baltimore, 1979.

¹⁸ John Miles Foley (ed.), *Oral Traditional Literature: A Festschrift for Albert Bates Lord*, Columbus, Ohio, 1980, pp. 390-93.

Association Internationale des Études Sud-Est Européennes in Belgrade in 1985. Some Yugoslav scholars find it difficult to approach freely any non-Karadžić texts, particularly those from Bosnian singers, with any degree of objectivity.

Very few Homerists outside of Yugoslavia could read the South Slav texts in the original language. There were some notable exceptions, especially David E. Bynum and Foley, who are actively working in this field. Bynum, editor of *SCHS* IV, VI and XIV, Serbo-Croat texts in the Parry Collection, including Avdo Medjodević's two longest songs as well as a volume of songs from the Buhać district in northern Bosnia, with his splendid and unusual knowledge of the Yugoslav collections, including the one we made together in the 1960s, has approached Homer in conjunction with the South Slav traditional songs and vice versa, first in 1964¹⁹ and with increasing frequency after that. Later Foley, as a comparatist, has written on both Homer and the South Slav poems in a number of papers, beginning about 1978. In addition to them, David M. Gunn of the University of Newcastle upon Tyne has made use of the Serbo-Croat texts in his study of Homer. He wrote two valuable articles in 1970 and 1971, stemming from Parry's and my work and using the Serbo-Croat texts in Volume II. The first was on 'Narrative Inconsistency and the Oral Dictated Text in the Homeric Epic'²⁰ and the second dealt with 'Thematic Composition and Homeric Authorship'.²¹ Gunn later moved into Old Testament studies, applying the same techniques of analysis in that field. Another English Homerist, now teaching at Columbia University, Richard Janko, has learned Serbo-Croat and is thus in a position to use it in his investigations of Homer, if he so wishes.

There was reaction on the part of Homerists to the translations, as distinct from the Serbo-Croat texts, of the songs in Volume I. Thematic studies of a comparative nature can be conducted with some accuracy by using translations. This was the case, for example, with William F. Hansen, whose 1972 monograph on *The Conference Sequence, Patterned Narration and Narrative Inconsistency in the Odyssey*²² made use of the South Slav songs in Volume I, and was well received. He continued in his use of South Slav and other modern oral traditions in his 1977 article 'Odysseus' Last Journey'.²³ Barry B. Powell of Wisconsin has also turned to the Serbo-Croat material in the Parry Collection for his studies of themes and story-patterns in Homer,

¹⁹ 'Kult dvaju junaka u kulturnoj istoriji' (*Anali filološkog fakulteta*, 4, 1964, pp. 65-73). See especially his fine article on Telemachos, 'Themes of the Young Hero in Serbocroatian Oral Epic Tradition' (*Publications of the Modern Language Association*, 83, 1968, pp. 1297-1303).

²⁰ *American Journal of Philology*, 91, 1970, pp. 192-203.

²¹ *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 75, 1971, pp. 1-31.

²² *University of California: Classical Studies*, 8, Berkeley, 1972.

²³ *Quaderni urbinati di cultura classica*, 24, 1977, pp. 27-48.

especially the *Odyssey*.²⁴

In England, after Bowra, Geoffrey S. Kirk, whose Homeric writings that concerned the Parry theory began in 1960,²⁵ paid more attention than anyone else to the South Slav songs themselves. Because of his influence and because he expressed clearly and frankly some of the problems he found in confronting the Yugoslav materials, I shall devote some time to his work. He, indeed, was one of the few scholars who read the South Slav material with care, insofar as he could in English. Kirk, and probably others as well, had expected more from the first volume of Serbo-Croat songs from the Collection than it could at first sight offer, and the reality was disappointing. Kirk still seemed to withhold final judgement, however, until the publication of 'The Wedding of Smailagić Meho'. To the best of my knowledge, the nearest he has come to expressing himself on that poem can be found in the introductory material to the first volume of *The Iliad: A Commentary*, which appeared in 1985. He wrote:

Very long oral or primarily oral poems are known from other cultures (for example *The Wedding of Smailagić Meho* by the Yugoslav singer Avdo Medjedović) but they are far simpler, more restricted in theme and vocabulary, more repetitive and generally vastly inferior to the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* — which by contrast may seem to develop their central plot and various sub-plots, as well as the complex interplay of characters, all kept in place by accurate foreshadowing and retrospect, in a way no singer however gifted could achieve.²⁶

In short, although I sincerely believe that Kirk has read *Smailagić Meho*, it does not seem to have made any difference in his thinking.

In *The Songs of Homer* Kirk wrote at length about the comparative study of Homer and the South Slav songs,²⁷ but he simply enlarged on what he had said in his 1960 article in the *Classical Quarterly*.²⁸ Although he had many fine things to say about Homer as an oral poet and about Homeric oral poetics, he was confused, it seems to me, in his labelling the South Slav *guslar* as 'reproductive' compared to the 'creative' Homeric *aoidos*.

One of the basic concepts that distinguishes oral traditional narrative poetry, as I know it in the South Slav tradition, from written poetry is that to the traditional 'singer of tales' the song is a *story*; a *text*, in the words that tell the story, is 'created' each time that it is sung. When

²⁴ See his 'Narrative Pattern in the Homeric Tale of Menelaus' (*Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 101, 1970, pp. 419-31) and *Composition by Theme in the Odyssey*.

²⁵ 'Homer and Modern Oral Poetry' (*Classical Quarterly*, 10, 1960, pp. 271-81).

²⁶ Cambridge, 1985, p. 13.

²⁷ Geoffrey S. Kirk, *The Songs of Homer*, Cambridge, 1962, pp. 83ff.

²⁸ 'Homer and Modern Oral Poetry: Some Confusions' (*Classical Quarterly*, 10, 1960, pp. 271-81).

Kirk says of the Yugoslav singers that 'they *do* seek to reproduce the songs they have learnt as exactly as possible, though by our literate standards this is not very exactly',²⁹ he is thinking about *text*, whereas the singer is thinking about the *story*. To state that the South Slav singers are reproductive rather than creative because they say that they have learnt their songs from other singers reflects a misunderstanding of the way in which an oral tradition like the South Slav functions.

Nevertheless, Kirk has brought to the fore the vastly important question of when and how the songs that make up a tradition at any given time came into being. I use the phrase 'came into being', instead of 'were created', advisedly, because the process involved is a gradual one, consisting of the merging and 're-emerging' of narrative units rather than of a number of single acts of creation. In *The Singer of Tales* I addressed the question of what a song is, differentiating between the generic song, e.g. a 'return' song, and a specific member of that category, such as 'The Return of Odysseus'.³⁰ The generic return song tells 1) why the hero is away from home for a long time, 2) the impending remarriage of the hero's wife, 3) the hero's return in disguise, 4) a series of recognitions, usually ending with that of the returned hero by his wife, and 5) their remarriage. The specific return song, 'The Return of Odysseus', tells the return of Odysseus from the Trojan War in terms of the generic return song.

It is true that the South Slav singers recognize 'specific' songs, although the use of titles among the singers themselves was introduced only during the nineteenth century after the appearance of published texts. One of the most far-reaching, but often unnoticed, impacts of Karadžić's collecting and publishing activities was to fix stories as well as the texts in the moulds established by the printed word. In an actively alive tradition of oral traditional narrative the boundaries between stories are often blurred, as I indicated earlier; one fuses into another, and new formations on old patterns of narrative crystallize for a time and in the course of time are themselves merged again with others. The fixed specificity in such traditions belongs to the stages after collecting and publishing have entered.

The specific return song/story that I have called 'The Return of Odysseus' was sung, or told, by many singers many times. It did not have any single text, any more than any oral traditional story has only one text, but in reality it had as many texts as there were performances. This specific return song must be kept separate, of course, from *The Odyssey* of Homer as we have it, which represents a particular performance, at a particular time, by a particular singer, namely Homer, of the specific return song, 'The Return of Odysseus'. Each performance, or telling, of the specific return song is a manifestation of

²⁹ Ibid., p. 276.

³⁰ Ch. 5, 'Songs and the Song'.

it by a given singer, at a given time, and under given circumstances.

We know that there was a vital tradition of oral epic song functioning in Ancient Greece, and we know that that tradition included 'return' songs other than that of Odysseus. At some time someone told about Odysseus the return story that was current about other people, using Odysseus's name and probably also adapting some pertinent local facts or fictions to the traditional thematic elements available.³¹ I find it difficult to believe that it was Homer who created that particular specific return song. We should seek real creativity not in the formation of the specific 'return song', but in the creativity of performance.

One wonders if within an oral narrative tradition the process of 'creation' of a 'new' 'specific' song, such as 'The Return of Odysseus', is in reality only one kind of creation in performance. The process is the same as what goes on to some degree in every performance. What matters is the quality of any singer's performance. The real 'newness', the real 'originality' is to be found in that. Homer created a monumental performance, to use Kirk's term, of 'The Return of Odysseus', a specific song that he told with the creativity of composition in performance!

He told the story of the return of Odysseus, expanding it through fullness of telling and of description, even as Avdo Medjedović did in his songs, a very brief example of which I quoted earlier. Homer also sang within the story of the return of Odysseus an account of Odysseus's wanderings, the major part of which is told in flash-back, a well-known traditional technique.³² Actually we have no way of knowing whether it was Homer who expanded the return story by that addition. I suspect, as have others, that the wanderings may have existed as a separate song, another multiform of which one sees in the journey of the Argonauts. Probably some adventures were included in the version of the return of Odysseus that Homer had heard, but it would be fully in keeping with his technique that he expanded them, as he surely expanded the story of the return himself.

I have a feeling — and it is no more than that, although it is a strong feeling — that Homer himself did add another story, the 'Telemachia', to the 'Return of Odysseus' plus the 'Wanderings'. One of my reasons

³¹ This process goes on continually in traditional story-telling and may account for the fact that we sometimes have traditional songs or stories about comparatively unknown 'heroes'; they were not unknown to the singer who put their names into a specific form of a generic story, nor to those singers who followed in his footsteps. 'The Song of Roland' may be a case in point. Roland, Count of the Marches, seems not to have been a very important person, until someone told of him a specific form of the generic traditional story of betrayal, quarrel, devastation, including death of a substitute and return, thus making him famous. In a similar way, I suspect, the song of 'The Return of Odysseus' first came into being.

³² The story within a story is common enough in tradition; one needs only to cite the case of Beowulf's telling of his adventures in Denmark, and numerous instances in the South Slav traditional songs.

for thinking this is so is that the weaving of the two tales together shows signs of still being in process. There is no space to go into details here, but I mentioned them in *The Singer of Tales*.³³

So the monumental epic of Homer's *Odyssey* developed through expansion from within and through addition of one or more other songs intimately related to the 'Return of Odysseus'. In the South Slav tradition, as I have noted in *The Singer of Tales*, return songs frequently have a sequel, which is a rescue song. They illustrate the technique of adding one song to another. Avdo Medjedović's *Wedding of Smailagić Meho* also illustrates that technique. The heroine gave young Meho an account of the atrocities of the treacherous vizier of Buda, and told how he had exiled her father to Bagdad. In the version that was read to Avdo when he learned the song, that is all we hear of Fatima's father. Avdo completed his song by telling in detail of the return and reinstatement of the girl's father, an original, though traditional enough, addition. In short, for these techniques used by Homer in creating the monumental epic of the *Odyssey* we can adduce similar techniques used by Avdo and other South Slav singers, such as Starac Milija, who gave Karadžić the splendid song of 'The Wedding of Maksim Crnojević'.³⁴

Nagy has emphasized quite correctly the significance of 'the tradition' in Ancient Greece, especially the growth of a pan-Hellenic tradition in Greece in the eighth century.³⁵ I should like to suggest that the movement from the local story of Odysseus, that I have posited as the 'origin' of his return song, to his status in a pan-Hellenic tradition of the returns of the heroes from Troy coincided with the growth of that tradition and that it was part of it. Perhaps my definition of a tradition as 'all the performances of all the songs of all the singers in a given linguistic and cultural community since the singing of songs began' may be pertinent here. The monumental epic belonged to Homer and to the tradition as well; we might have reversed the order and said that it belonged to the tradition and to Homer, because he was part of the tradition.

There seem also to have been some problems among Homerists with the concept of 'oral dictated texts', an idea that was first expressed in Parry's field notes and which stemmed from his experience in collecting songs in Yugoslavia by both dictation and electrical recording. The phrase indicated texts that have been dictated by an oral traditional poet to a scribe. Writing was not in a way necessary for their *composition*, but only for their *recording*. The 'monumental poems' were entirely possible without writing, although at some point the *Iliad* and the

³³ Ch.8, pp. 158-85.

³⁴ See Karadžić II, No. 88.

³⁵ See his 'An Evolutionary Model for the Text Fixation of Homeric Epos', in John Miles Foley (ed.), *Oral Traditional Literature*, Columbus, Ohio, 1981, pp. 390-93.

Odyssey must have been written down.

If composition and recording are simultaneous, then there is no problem with transmission. But if they are not simultaneous, as some scholars believe, how were the Homeric poems transmitted from Homer to their writing down from some other singer? Is it possible that Homer created the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in their present form in his mind, reproduced them in that form whenever he sang them, and transmitted them to other singers in that form so that they in turn could pass them on in that form? Does a singer create the same text every time he sings a song? Does a singer learning a song from another singer reproduce exactly the other singer's text? The evidence from the South Slav epic is plain for all of these questions.³⁶ If one is speaking of an exact fixed text, the answer is definitely negative.

On the other hand — and this is important — there is a *degree* of similarity, if not fixity, among the texts of the same song by the same singer. While one cannot predict with certainty from any previous singing what the text of the next singing will be, one can predict, if one has a number of singings of the same song from the same singer, some of the lines that will probably appear in one form or another.³⁷ This phenomenon is not the same as a fixed text, but it is not complete fluidity either.³⁸

The *transmission* of that 'unfixed' text, definable though it may be within given parameters, to another singer is another matter. In a limited body of material Gunn indicated that another singer from the same community shares many lines with other singers in that community, but also has marked idiosyncracies of his own. This means that the text of the man who learned how to sing the versions of traditional stories he heard Homer sing would have some relationship with Homer's text — and with all other texts in the community — but it would also have the second man's individual traits, which sometimes replaced Homer's individual traits. With this second man, do we still have Homer's text? And when the song goes to a third singer and to a fourth, whose text do we have when the song is finally written down from the fourth singer? Is it Homer's? Or is it the fourth singer's? Or is it the tradition's? Or is it all of them? The question is a difficult one and the answer must reflect the complexities.

³⁶ See Volumes II, IV, VI, and XIV of *Serbocroatian Heroic Songs*, especially the songs of Salih Ugljanin, from whom we have three versions of both the 'Song of Bagdad' and 'The Captivity of Djulić Ibrahim' in Vol. II, and two versions of 'The Wedding of Vlahinjić Alija' from Avdo Medjedović in Vol. II.

³⁷ Gunn's article on thematic composition, based on his Melbourne doctoral dissertation, presents illustrative examples, and one could discover this for oneself by observation of the songs in Vol. II.

³⁸ The situation seems similar in the Pabuji epic from Rajastan. See John D. Smith, 'The Singer or the Song? A Reassessment of Lord's "Oral Theory"' (*Man*, 12, 1977, pp. 141-53).

This is not the place to pursue this vital problem any further. Some scholars would shift models and discard the South Slav parallels. One note of caution, however, should be struck. For any model to be useful it must be of the same kind of narrative technique as that of the Homeric poems and be capable of sustaining long story-telling at a comparably rapid pace. The Rajastani heroic epic songs that I have heard recently, for example, repeat the same line a number of times and in several different ways, thus making the progress of the narrative from one line to another extremely slow. This is still essentially ritual poetry, as I comprehend it, and time is not of the essence for its performance. I cannot conceive of the action of the Homeric poems being told in that manner of performance. On the other hand, there may be much to be learned from a study of texts sung by members of the same caste of musicians in India. Nor would a model of short songs, such as the fixed songs of the Somali poets, which are short occasional compositions, be useful. They can tell us little, I believe, about Homer. But some of the traditions from Central Asia might make excellent models, and I refer the question to Karl Reichl of Bonn, himself a field collector as well as a research scholar in Central Asiatic epic and in Anglo-Saxon, and to A.T. Hatto, with his extensive knowledge of both Kirghiz and medieval Germanic epic. There is still much to be done in this area. We do not yet have real answers.

In spite of some of the misgivings that Kirk has had about the nature of oral traditional poetry, some of which have unfortunately arisen from his misunderstanding of the South Slav songs, he has not only fully accepted Homer as an oral traditional poet, but has also become one of the most articulate and influential proponents of that idea, gratifyingly cognizant of many of the differences between oral and written poetics.

In Germany the late Albin Lesky, an admirer of Parry's work on Homer and in principle a supporter of his theoretical stance, was of the opinion that the publication of 'Smailagić Meho' would surely not change anyone's opinion about the South Slav songs. He wrote:

Wir durften nun den Kern unseres Problem erreicht haben: über Mundlichkeit oder Schriftlichkeit der homerischen Konzeption kann allein aus stilistischen Momenten entscheiden werden. Unsere letzte Frage lautet also: sind Aufbau und Durchführung der homerischen Erzählung so beschaffen, dass man sich diese in reiner Mundlichkeit entstanden denken kann? Hier erhält nun sein besonderes Gewicht, was uns Wolfgang Schadewalt an der Ilias gezeigt hat. Er hat nicht allein den grossartigen Plan der Dichtung eindrucksvoll sichtbar gemacht, sondern auch eine bis ins Einzelne reichende Technik des Vorbereitens, Retardierens und Verbindens gezeigt, die formlich über einer Schicht traditionelltypischen Erzählens das homerische Gedicht zum grossen Kunstwerk macht ...

All das, wofür diese beiden Beispiele stehen, ist in einer mundlich konzipierten Epik nicht gut denkbar. Wohl wird uns gelegentlich versichert, dass auch 'oral composition' in manchen Fällen eine beachtliche Technik des Fügens erkennen lasse, aber wenn wir den Auszug aus dem vielberufenen Epos des Avdo Mededović in Bowra's Buch (352) lesen, bleibt der Abstand von

homerischer Kunst doch der entscheidende Eindruck. Es ist kaum zu erwarten, dass die Veröffentlichung des vollständigen Texts daran etwas ändern wird.³⁹

I find this definitive judgment of material which he had never seen by an eminent Homerist with no knowledge of the languages or cultures involved to be shocking. It has been an unfortunate characteristic of writings on this subject. What would Classicists say about a scholar with no knowledge of Greek, or even of Ancient Greece, who made a judgement about the overall structure of the *Iliad* on the basis of an excerpt of a page and a half from a translation?

In actuality, an opportunity was missed by these eminent scholars, and others like them, because in Volumes I and II in the original language and in English translation there is ample material to study a number of problems that are very pertinent to the Homeric Question, but only a few scholars were interested enough to make use of it. What was needed, and what still is needed, was a willingness to read the South Slav songs with the same sympathetic attitude, free of prejudice of one kind or another, with which one approaches any other poetry, traditional or otherwise. None is so blind as he who does not wish to see.

I should like to close these comments with two very positive appraisals of *The Wedding of Smailagić Meho* by Homerists who read the translation of that song with a deep appreciation of its value for Homeric criticism. Professor Richard Whitaker of the University of Natal wrote, after reading the translation of 'Smailagić Meho':

I must say, it certainly did dent my prejudices concerning the capabilities of an illiterate singer. Avdo's control of the plot and his ability to develop and sustain a scene are really masterly. I was very impressed also by his sense of form and proportion in his handling of the story. As you have pointed out in your Introduction and elsewhere, one is constantly reminded of Homer: the descriptions of physical objects, the scenes of hospitality, the narrative expansion to lend weight to significant detail, the trivial inconsistencies, the catalogues, and the horse- and foot-races in Avdo's 1950 version. I notice that

³⁹ 'We must now have reached the heart of our problem: the question of oral or written composition of the Homeric poems can be decided only on the grounds of stylistic considerations. Our last question, therefore, runs: are the structure and realisation of the Homeric narrative such that one can think of them as arising from pure orality? Here, what Wolfgang Schadewalt has shown us about the *Iliad* carries particular weight. He has not only made visible the magnificent plan of the poem, but he has also demonstrated in detail the technique of foreshadowing, retarding, and linking, which has raised the Homeric poem from the level of tradition/typical narration to a great work of art ... All that these two examples stand for is not conceivable in an orally conceived epic. Although we are sometimes assured that in many cases 'oral composition' allows for a notable technique of construction, when we read the excerpt from the frequently mentioned epic of Avdo Medjedović in Bowra's book, the discrepancy between it and Homeric art remains the decisive impression. It is scarcely to be expected that the publication of the complete text will change that.' (See 'Mundlichkeit und Schriftlichkeit im homerischen Epos', *Festschrift für Dietrich Kralik*, 1954, pp. 7-8.)

whereas in Homer themes are often repeated virtually word-for-word, in Avdo's poem the wording of the same theme tends to vary more. This makes one wonder whether Homer's wording may not have tended to be 'homogenized' by centuries of manuscript tradition, the scribes 'correcting' his wording in one passage by reference to a similar or near-identical passage elsewhere.⁴⁰

One is grateful for such a careful and sympathetic reading by a Homeric scholar whose primary interest is in the breadth and depth of Homer's thought and in the great artistry of the poems. He has emphasized those elements of Avdo's art that are similar to Homer's.

My distinguished colleague Cedric Whitman, author of *Homer and the Heroic Tradition*, wrote to me on receiving a copy of the published translation:

Smailagić Meho at last! Thanks to your kindness, I'd read the translation of the poem in manuscript, but now I can send students to it ... As I read your introduction, I felt for the first time in my life, as if one could form *some* idea of how Homer may have used his traditional source-material to make a work of traditional art, and for what it means for a poet to *be* his tradition. The transition from Semić to Avdo is amazing, and beautiful. Hitherto, I've had only the vaguest intuiting about how such a thing could take place; now at last we can begin to see, in a specific case and on a large scale, how a traditional, oral poet's mind works at its best. It's terribly exciting.⁴¹

From the meticulous and gifted scholar-poet, whose sensitivity of Homer's poetics and whose analysis of the structure of the *Iliad* have gained much attention, these words were especially meaningful. These are but a few of the reactions by Homerists to the South Slav songs. Where the eyes were clear, they have seen much that is worthwhile in them.

In sum, in Homeric times, in the eighth century BC, there were many traditional singers besides Homer and many other songs than the stories of Achilles and of Odysseus, as well as many other singings of those two by Homer and others. We have known this to be true for some time, of course, but we have not fully realized, I believe, that the same kind of 'network' of formulas and themes, and clusters of both, and particularly of songs or stories, that I have spoken of earlier in the South Slav tradition, existed also in the Ancient Greek tradition. Homer was part of that network. Like all the other singers before and after him, he embodies the tradition. All singers are creators, or re-creators, of the tradition whenever they tell its heroic tales. Some, like Homer, have extraordinary talent and transform the tradition into poetry of the greatest magnitude, and others are more modest in ability and their songs are less impressive. But they all make manifest the tradition; they

⁴⁰ Communication to the author.

⁴¹ Communication to the author, 18 January 1975.

are all traditional, including Homer at his most 'original'.⁴² For the Ancient Greek tradition to be rich enough to produce a Homer, there must have been many other talented singers before him, forming it, shaping its contours. Homer, the unique poet of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, was the greatest of the singers of tales, and his magnificent poems are the apex of the grandeur of the Archaic Greek oral epic. The South Slav tradition, to which Vuk Stefanović Karadžić introduced us in the last century, has helped us to see the whole remarkable panorama in proper perspective.

⁴² The same is true, of course, in the so-called written literary tradition. *All* writers belong to the literary tradition, even though some are gifted and some are not.

Chapter Two

Vuk Karadžić and the achievement of his singers

SVETOZAR KOLJEVIĆ

What is the nature of the epic stylization of great heroes and important events? How far and in what sense are the hero and story 'historical'? What is the impact of literary tradition on the shaping of heroic songs? What historical and spiritual needs does oral epic poetry satisfy? Are the greatest moments of its imaginative achievement necessarily formulaic, formulopoeic, or quite un-formulaic? Vuk Stefanović Karadžić's collections are not perhaps unique but they are exceptional in so far as they give abundant evidence for diverse and contradictory answers to such questions: they embody a mystery of oral art which survives all the answers it seems to suggest. How far is this Karadžić's personal contribution to the art of his singers? And how was this paradoxical diversity achieved? Perhaps like everything else in art: *par hazard et par génie*. For Karadžić's epic lucky star shone remarkably brightly.

To begin with, there was the historical bliss of several centuries of major European border-fighting along thousands of miles of moveable borders in Venetian Dalmatia, and along the Croatian, Austrian and Hungarian military frontiers that stretched from the Adriatic coast to Slavonia and Vojvodina. This border-fighting, regular and irregular, was coupled with inland outlawry in the Turkish regions, so that sometimes a border-fighter and an outlaw were one and the same person, like Stari Vujadin who refers to outlaw winter shelters and wears a Venetian military decoration, as well as a coat worthy of a pasha.¹ Moreover, the recruitment of border-fighters and outlaws was possible owing to migrations of the largely Orthodox population, with long and bitter memories daily revived in new blood-baths. Finally, Karadžić happened to live at the moment this tradition had its swan-song, the time of the First Serbian Uprising, which brought together many fragments of long memory, gave a particular historical perspective to the whole heroic landscape, and attracted some of the greatest singers — Filip Višnjić, Tešan Podrugović, Starac Milija and others — into a common epic orbit.

¹ See 'Stari Vujadin', in Vuk Stef. Karadžić, *Srpske narodne pjesme*, Vladan Nedić (ed.), Belgrade, 1976 (I-IV), III, No. 50, lines 14-16, 31-33. This edition will henceforth be referred to as *Karadžić*.

Karadžić himself was also a unique collector in so far as he 'combined in his own person both the literate and non-literate cultures'.² He could write down genuine heroic songs from memory and yet come to realize that he himself was not a good singer, look for better singers for some of his songs, or simply leave them out of his later collections.³ When he lived as an exile in Vienna (1813-14), after the breakdown of the national cause he had served, his memory was not only a storehouse of heroic songs, but 'an enormous inventory of Serbian reality and everything that was connected with that distant reality', not 'a mere mnemotechnical phenomenon but also the fruit and the measure' of his 'intimate ties with his people and their destiny'.⁴ Karadžić may have had the memory of a mediocre singer, but he was a singer who 'grew up where heroic poems were sung and recited (as in the middle of Herzegovina)', so that he 'knew many, many of them from his childhood and understood them just as ordinary folk understand them'.⁵ His father's house was the winter abode of many singers who came from Herzegovina and, as in the good old outlaw times, 'they sang and recited poems all winter long'.⁶ His grandfather and his uncle were singers, and even his father who, as 'a pious and serious-minded man', cared little for songs,⁷ inadvertently remembered such master-works as 'Pieces of Various Kosovo Poems' and 'The Division of the Jakšići'. And can one imagine a more exciting time or a better place for listening to heroic songs than Loznica in 1807, where Karadžić worked as a scribe for Jakov Nenadović? For his master, a priest and a famous military leader, liked heroic songs so much that he could hardly eat lunch or dinner without them: 'the captains selected and brought to us the best singers from their companies'.⁸ In short, a selective taste was at work even in the formative years, and Karadžić never stopped looking for the best singers and songs to the end of his life.

He was in fact so deeply steeped in the folk traditions that his introduction to the world of education was an uneasy one. As an elderly pupil he was mesmerized by the educated world as embodied in Lukijan Mušicki, and when Mušicki asked him to write down 'blind women's' or 'blind men's songs', he was ashamed to do so because he took the

² M. P. Coote, 'Serbo-Croatian Heroic Songs', *Heroic Epic and Saga*, in Felix J. Oinas (ed.), Bloomington, 1978, p. 260.

³ See Ljub. Stojanović, *Život i rad Vuka Karadžića*, Belgrade, 1924, pp. 57-64.

⁴ Ivo Andrić, 'Vukov primer', *Umetnik i njegovo delo, Eseji II*, Sabrana dela, XIII, Belgrade, 1976, p. 116.

⁵ Vuk Stef. Karadžić, 'Pravi uzrok i početak skupljanja našijeh narodnijeh pjesama' in Borivoje Marinković (ed.), *O srpskoj narodnoj poeziji*, Belgrade, 1964, p. 184.

⁶ V. S. Karadžić, 'Predgovor četvrtoj knjizi narodnih pesama tzv. 'lajpciškog izdanja' [hereafter 'Predgovor četvrtoj knjizi'], *O srpskoj narodnoj poeziji*, p. 154.

⁷ Ibid., p. 147.

⁸ Ibid., p. 154, footnote 9.

request as a reminder that he was a former swineherd.⁹ But this germ of literary snobbery would come to fruition only much later, in one of the few blunders he made, when he claimed that Mérimée's fraud, *La Guzla*, contained some genuine folk songs which were 'not bad'.¹⁰ Whether due to his inadequate French (and he did say that he would have liked to see the originals in order to judge these poems), or simply inspired by the desire to help the great national cause along, the pronouncement is an almost perfect reflection of the fashionable European literary taste prevailing at the time. And what did he mean in the note from his mature years in which he points out that when he came to Vienna in 1813, it was Jernej Kopitar (1780-1844) who 'persuaded me to write folk poems'?¹¹ Does this phrase betray an 'Ossianic' touch, or is he using the word 'write' in the sense of 'write down'? The context suggests that he is using the word in the sense of 'writing down' from his memory, and he was probably the only Serb at the time who was a master of both oral and written mysteries. He still had a long way to go in becoming a great literary figure, but after only a few years we find him writing books in collaboration with some of the greatest European scholars of the time: the Serbian grammar with Jacob Grimm and *The Serbian Revolution* with Leopold Ranke. In the meantime, he lived in Srem from the end of 1814 to the middle of 1815 and, encouraged by Kopitar, wrote down over 200 'women's songs' and several dozen heroic poems, many of them from his greatest poets, such as Podrugović, Višnjić, blind Živana and others. It was Mušicki who brought Višnjić to his monastery in Šišatovac and enabled Karadžić to write down fifteen poems, even if Mušicki was seldom present at the recitals: 'the learned poetaster could not listen to the poet'.¹²

The only thing that Karadžić contributed to his singers was his absolute trust in their art, his unparalleled understanding of it, his perseverance in seeking out the best songs and his critical genius in discerning them. His editing was negligible,¹³ his arrangement simple and straightforward, basically chronological, with poems grouped round certain heroes and historical events. But unlike earlier and many

⁹ V. S. Karadžić, 'Predgovor prvoj knjizi Pjesnarice', *O srpskoj narodnoj poeziji*, p. 38.

¹⁰ 'Prikaz knjige "La Guzla" Prospera Merimea', *ibid.*, p. 125.

¹¹ 'Pravi uzrok i početak skupljanja našijeh narodnijeh pjesama', *ibid.*, p. 183.

¹² V. Nedić, 'Filip Višnjić', *Narodna književnost*, in Vladan Nedić (ed.), Belgrade, 1966, p. 326.

¹³ According to V. Nedić, Vuk Karadžić respected the 'authenticity' of his singers 'more than any of his contemporaries' ('Karadžićeva zbirka narodnih pesama', *Karadžić*, IV, p. 391). This view is confirmed by John M. Foley: 'In general, the emendations introduced by Vuk into the texts of the songs that he published seem, on the basis of the evidence available, to be infrequent and slight; more importantly for our purposes, they seem also to have been insignificant with respect to the larger question of aesthetics' ('Literary art and oral tradition in Old English and Serbian Poetry', *Anglo-Saxon England*, XII, 1983, pp. 192-94).

later collectors who wrote down whatever they could get hold of, and included it in their manuscripts, or books, without regard to the inherent artistic logic, Karadžić aimed at giving a complete picture of the epic awareness of history as embodied in the greatest songs. On one occasion he complained that he could publish two more volumes of the recorded songs if he 'could only find a singer to tell them in a beautiful manner'.¹⁴ He also refused to publish any of the several versions of 'The Wedding of King Vukašin', until he managed to record a magnificent variant sung to him by Stojan the Outlaw while serving his sentence in jail for having killed a witch who had 'eaten' his child.¹⁵ And it is also to his perseverance that we owe such masterpieces as 'Banović Strahinja' and 'The Wedding of Maksim Crnojević': he managed to get hold of Starac Milija in Kragujevac in 1822 only when Prince Miloš, himself illiterate, gave strict orders to his head clerk to have 'Milija brought in alive or dead'.¹⁶ The recording of these poems from a singer who could not 'tell' them or even sing without drinking 'slivovitz' was a great ordeal, which came to an end only when some loitering yokels managed to persuade Starac Milija that his harvest would go to the dogs if he went on wasting his time with such a madman as Karadžić who cared, obviously, only for songs.¹⁷

Karadžić's criteria of selection were perhaps as instinctive as the art of his singers, but his simple casual remarks are still illuminating. He made important distinctions between the 'telling' (*kazivanje*) and the 'singing' (*pevanje*) of songs,¹⁸ between singing old songs and composing (*spevavanje*) new ones.¹⁹ He claimed that it was middle-aged or old singers, such as Filip Višnjić,²⁰ who could make up new songs.²¹ But above all he believed in the principle of selection and the importance of the individual talent of particular singers. This is why he claims that it is 'necessary to choose' among songs,²² that there are many singers of 'mediocre touch' (*srednje ruke*),²³ and many songs of no interest or value: 'where they sprout, there they stay'.²⁴ He also pointed out that a man 'who knew fifty songs (if he is any good at it) would find it easy to make up a new song'.²⁵ Finally, he was clearly aware of the artistic possibilities of a particular song or singer: as a song can 'develop and

14 'Predgovor četvrtoj knjizi', p. 154, footnote 9.

15 Ibid., p. 140.

16 Ibid., p. 173.

17 Ibid., p. 139.

18 See 'Predgovor prvoj knjizi', pp. 89, 97; 'Predgovor četvrtoj knjizi', pp. 135, 138.

19 See 'Predgovor prvoj knjizi', p. 89; 'Predgovor četvrtoj knjizi', p. 136.

20 See 'Predgovor prvoj knjizi', p. 89.

21 See 'Predgovor četvrtoj knjizi', p. 136.

22 Ibid., pp. 152-53.

23 'Predgovor prvoj knjizi', p. 104.

24 Ibid., p. 93.

25 Ibid., p. 89.

grow in ornament', so it can 'degenerate',²⁶ as 'one man can talk more beautifully and clearly than another, so he can sing and tell poems'.²⁷ He knew, of course, that the search for a good song was a search for a good singer or teller of poems: if his finest poet Podrugović were:

to hear the worst poem, after a few days he would speak it beautifully and in the proper order which was characteristic of his other songs, or he would not remember it at all, and he would say that it was silly, not worth remembering or telling.²⁸

Uttered at a time when collectors had strong public, patriotic and fashionable literary reasons to believe that the songs were an expression of collective national creativity and not of mere individual masters of their art, when it was widely believed that the songs were memorized and handed down, ready-made, 'from one generation to another' (*s koljena na koljeno*), and that they spread 'from mouth to mouth' (*od usta do usta*), Karadžić's remarks were illuminating because, like most of his pronouncements, they were sober-minded and down-to-earth. If they sound, in their basic implications, a little on the obvious side today, this is only a sign of how much ahead of his time Karadžić was in his understanding of the singer of tales.

However, it is not his sporadic comments but his collections of heroic songs that are a monument to his great insight. In their imaginative and moral range they are the richest reflection of the history of his people and the various spiritual possibilities of its interpretation. They cover the whole story of the greatness and folly of the medieval Serbian lords, of the disaster at Kosovo and their defence of the symbols of honour in the shadow of this historical calamity, of the strange and cunning ways of survival in vassalage and outlawry, and of the second coming of national freedom at the time of the Uprising, in which the *rayah* became the main protagonist. And yet, diverse as the historical settings and landscapes in these poems are, 'each individual story' seems to be 'only one scene in a continuous drama'.²⁹ This dramatic unity lives on formulas and their historical and imaginative implications, on repetition and variation which mark oral epic singing as an art of allusion: many lines and many themes seem to echo the whole tradition. On the other hand, the formulas are only the standard inflexions of the poetic voice of a conquered and unconquerable people who dream in slavery of their lost greatness and sense the dawn of approaching freedom.

This epic exploration of history is deeply rooted in an artistic

²⁶ Ibid., p. 96.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ 'Predgovor četvrtoj knjizi', p. 151.

²⁹ Zora Devrnja Zimmerman, 'Introduction', *Serbian Folk Poetry: Ancient Legends, Romantic Songs*, Columbus, Ohio, 1986, p. 87.

synchronization of disparate times, events and localities. Thus in 'Uroš and the Mrljavčevići' King Vukašin curses his son Marko for refusing to tell a lie in his favour:

Before you are separated from your soul
May you see service under a Turkish tsar!³⁰

At the same time Uroš blesses his truth-loving *kum*:

May no hero be better than you!
May your name be remembered everywhere
As long as the sun and the moon shine!³¹

Both the father's curse and the *kum*'s blessing come true and express the ambiguity of Marko's heroism in Turkish vassalage. Thus they connect the epic landscape on the threshold of the Kosovo disaster with that of Marko's later time, testifying that the story is spun from the very beginning in full awareness of the historical and moral turns it will later take. On the other hand, the evocation of Sultan Murad's death and his last message to his viziers about how to deal with the *rayah*:

Do not deal bitterly with the *rayah*.³²

'The Beginning of the Revolt Against the Dahijas' shows that the end of the story is spun from the threads connecting the Kosovo disaster with the time of outlawry, Turkish *zulum* and the threshold of freedom. The historical events, or the imaginative reflection of the historical events which took place in different centuries and different socio-cultural settings, are brought together in a synchronized story in order to express the totality of the imaginative awareness of history. This artistic order, imposed on historical chaos, results in a mixture of pagan, feudal and Christian elements with those of the later patriarchal village civilization. So, for instance, the nephew of Tsar Dušan prides himself on being a cattle-breeder and not just a ploughman:

My father never ploughed the earth at all
And yet my father fed me on fine bread.³³

³⁰ *Karadžić*, II, No. 34, lines 248-49.

I da bi ti duša ne ispala,
Dok Turskoga cara ne dvorio!

All quotations from heroic songs are given here in the English translation of Anne Pennington and Peter Levi.

³¹ *Ibid.*, lines 254-56.

Nada te se ne našlo junaka!
Ime ti se svuda spominjalo,
Dok je sunca i dok je mjeseca!

³² *Karadžić*, IV, No. 24, line 112. 'Vi nemojte raji gorki biti'.

³³ *Karadžić*, II, No. 29, lines 292-93.

A Queen Mother will come to persuade her son to marry because she is old and sick of such chores as washing his blood-stained clothes!³⁴ In 'The Building of Skadar' the relations within the royal family are described in terms of those prevailing in patriarchal village communities, including the assumption that men never stooped to interfere with the division of labour among women.³⁵

These and hundreds of similar examples are not just 'anachronisms' or 'errors' but an essential feature of the epic convention in which medieval knights and princes often speak in the thundering and self-confident voices of later outlaw captains, in which outlaws and their leaders are often deeply imbued with and inspired by a chivalric concept of honour, loyalty and dignity. If in this landscape the 'white palaces' sometimes denote ordinary peasant houses,³⁶ if wine rather than 'slivovitz' — the standard peasant drink — is consumed on these premises,³⁷ if in this non-literary milieu messages are sent in the form of 'books',³⁸ these are not aberrations but the distinctive features of a poetic system in which an epic form feeds on imaginative daydreaming about history.

This epic synchronization is, of course, based on the wide range of shared formulas and themes connected with feasts and messages, council-holding and preparation for battle, journeys and single combats. If many of these formulas are common not only to Karadžić's singers, but also to those of preceding centuries,³⁹ the particular 'cycles' of poems sometimes have their own distinctive formulas and themes. For obvious historical reasons, the building of 'many foundations' is characteristic of pre-Kosovo poems,⁴⁰ and the choice of a 'Heavenly Kingdom' is made in Kosovo poems alone.⁴¹ The gathering of homeless outlaws whose home is nothing but 'a mountain cloak' takes place in poems about outlawry and border-fighting,⁴² whereas the 'poor *rayah*', who grow 'like grass out of the earth',⁴³ 'tie a red flame to the sky' in poems about the Uprising.⁴⁴ And who else but Marko Kraljević could 'drive' the Turkish 'tsar to the wall'⁴⁵ — not only through his

Mene nije ni otac orao,
Pak je mene ljebom odranio.

³⁴ See *ibid.*, No. 73, line 9.

³⁵ See Zora Devrnja Zimmerman, *op. cit.*, p. 299.

³⁶ See, for instance, *Karadžić*, III, No. 69, lines 45, 66 ('bijeli dvori').

³⁷ See, for instance, *ibid.*, No. 1, line 1, No. 2, line 1 ('vino piju').

³⁸ See, for instance, *ibid.*, No. 42, lines 1-2; No. 69, line 1; IV, No. 47, line 8.

³⁹ See Svetozar Koljević, *Epic in the Making*, Oxford, 1980, pp. 40-52.

⁴⁰ *Karadžić*, II, No. 24, line 16 ('mloge zadužbine').

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, No. 46, lines 13, 20, 31, 37 ('carstvo nebesko').

⁴² *Karadžić*, III, No. 69, line 40 ('divan-kabanica' misprinted as 'divna-kabanica').

⁴³ *Karadžić*, IV, No. 24, line 569 ('Usta raja k'o iz zemlje trava').

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, No. 35, line 352 ('crven plamen za nebo svezao').

⁴⁵ *Karadžić*, II, No. 72, line 94 ('Dok dotera cara do duvara').

supernatural strength, but also because, in view of basic assumptions about vassalage, only he could have the opportunity to do so.

However, as many formulas cross the borders of particular cycles of poems, so many individual heroes often lend their distinctive features to their brethren in other cycles and different historical and epic settings. This kind of epic 'contamination' is reflected, for instance, in Miloš's defiant language when he denies Tsar Lazar's accusation of prospective treason at the feast on the eve of the Kosovo battle and promises to tie up Vuk Branković, the actual traitor, as 'woman ties wool on a distaff'⁴⁶ and carry him in this fashion to the battlefield. At this moment the greatest of the medieval heroes gives up feudal etiquette and speaks the idiom of the later outlaw setting marked by village customs and habits. Similarly, the broad humour of defiance in vassalage, characteristic of the songs about Marko Kraljević, is reflected in the language of Miloš Voinović when addressing his inferior superiors in 'Dušan's Wedding'. When Miloš Voinović is about to leap over three horses with sword-shaped flames above them, his sovereign, Tsar Dušan the Mighty, curses the tailor who made him such a long mountain cloak and advises him to take it off. Miloš answers in an unmistakable accent of sly mockery, so characteristic of songs about Marko:

Sit down, my tsar, and drink red wine,
Do not worry about my mountain cloak;
If there is a heart in the hero,
The mountain cloak will not be in the way.⁴⁷

It may not be pure coincidence that the teller of this poem was Podrugović, to whom we also owe some of the greatest poems about Marko's comic vassalage. But in the analogous situation of a Turkish tax-collector, in Višnjić's 'The Beginning of the Revolt Against the Dahijas', Ilija Birćanin speaks the same language of carefully measured defiance when he throws the bag with the money to his master Memed-aga and advises him not to count it, for it has already been counted.⁴⁸

Marko Kraljević is seen as the ruler of a province and not merely as a Turkish tax-collector, whereas Miloš Voinović is the undeservedly discarded nephew of a silly Serbian tsar. But what they share is the humour of the underdog, which is not only the result of epic contamination between heroes from different cycles of poems, but also a major feature of Serbo-Croat epic singing. This humour reflects a spiritual need for survival in bondage — a need which is also widely

⁴⁶ Ibid., No. 50 (III), line 62 ('Kao žena kudelj' uz preslicu').

⁴⁷ Ibid., No. 29, lines 479-82.
Sjedi, care, pak pij rujno vino,
Ne brini se mojom kabanicom;
Ako bude srce u junaku,
Kabanica ne će ništa smesti.

⁴⁸ Ibid., No. 24, lines 278-79.

demonstrated today in the political jokes of many countries, particularly where they are felt as a social threat and a public danger. It differs as much from the Homeric mockery of the enemy as it does from the gloomy jokes in *Beowulf* — such as the description of Grendel's devastation of Hrothgar's court when the warrior's 'night's table laughter turned to morning's lamentation'.⁴⁹ It is also different from the comic light in which we see the simple-minded Ilija Muromec who, as a defiant and quarrelsome protector of the weak, has sometimes been compared to Marko Kraljević.⁵⁰ The humour in the poems about Marko Kraljević is above all an imaginative effort to discover a possibility of human survival in vassalage — when all the major battles are already lost. This is why Marko is entitled even to perjury — when he, as a prisoner, deludes the daughter of the Arab king, swearing loyalty not to the girl but to the cap on his knee and explaining to an imaginary listener that he cannot be expected to be more faithful to his word than the changing sun which does not give so much heat in winter as it does in the summer.⁵¹ And he owes his greatest triumph to the advice of the *vila* who reminds him of chivalric etiquette:

It would be a shame for two to fight against one.⁵²

and, in the same breath, tells him that he should draw his hidden knives and kill the stronger enemy.⁵³ This comic view of the universe, of history and its epic possibilities, is also reflected when Marko requests his enemy:

Do not wake up the fleas in my sheepskin.⁵⁴

while he is being severely beaten. In short, Marko is a hero who refuses to be fascinated by overwhelming force and violence — he sees such force as a trick and he opposes it with his own tricks. This is a strangely mature comic view of the historical and epic landscape: it does not imply that the world should be perfect to be worthy of our love, and, on the threshold of death, Marko takes his farewell from this world in a highly characteristic utterance:

Deceiving world, my fair flower.⁵⁵

Such a concept of the epic hero could not fit traditional assumptions

⁴⁹ *Beowulf*, trans. Michael Alexander, Harmondsworth, 1976, p. 55 (lines 128-29).

⁵⁰ See Nikolay Ivanovich Kravcov, *Serbskiy epos*, Moscow, 1966.

⁵¹ *Karadžić*, II, No. 64, lines 52-57.

⁵² *Ibid.*, No. 67, line 243 ('Sramota je dvome na jednoga').

⁵³ See *ibid.*, line 243.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, No. 59, line 166 ('Ne budi mi po kožu buha').

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, II, No. 74, line 68 ('Laživ sv'jete, moj lijepi cv'jetel!').

about the 'high' status of heroic poetry; even Goethe failed to understand it and claimed that Marko could stand only as a 'rough pendant of the Greek Hercules', and that merely 'in a barbaric way'.⁵⁶ So Marko appears in this assessment as 'a monstrous hero, irascible like no other';⁵⁷ 'much as we may admire him', he is 'not in the least attractive'.⁵⁸ And the same misunderstanding is echoed in more recent times by the Chadwicks: 'Marko is not a very attractive hero, according to modern ideas'; he is 'sometimes more of an ogre than a hero' — 'physical strength and heavy drinking are among his chief characteristics', and 'he owes much to his horse Šarac, which he feeds on wine'.⁵⁹ Of course, both Marko and Šarac would take this as a compliment, but this attitude to Marko is essentially interesting in so far as it shows how the comedy of vassalage and its underdog humour were completely alien and repellent to the 'high' epic assumptions of dominant nations whose literary culture was already well-established.

But in Karadžić's collections — unlike the really rough and blundering comedy of *The Erlangen Manuscript* — this comic sense of epic possibilities expresses an alternative worldview which sometimes breaks out in chivalric and tragic contexts. Thus on the eve of Kosovo Ivan Kosačić describes the nightmare of the Turkish forces in a culinary metaphor:

If all of us were turned into rock salt,
We could not salt the dinner of the Turks.⁶⁰

And with an equal sense of the possibilities of comic dignity Miloš Obilić, the greatest chivalric hero, asks him to hide the truth from Tsar Lazar and tell him that the Turks have an army of 'old hodjas and old hadjis', 'apprentices and young merchants', who 'never saw a battle in their lives' and 'came to war to have bread to eat'.⁶¹ Similarly Captain Ćurčija, also engaged in spying on the enormous Turkish army in 'The

⁵⁶ 'Serbische Lieder', *Kunsttheoretische Schriften und Übersetzungen — Schriften zur Literatur*, II, Berliner Ausgabe, 18, Berlin, 1972, p. 278. This article was first published in *Über Kunst und Altertum*, 2 May 1825.

⁵⁷ 'Völklied der Serben', op. cit., p. 292. This article was first published in 1833 (Ausgabe letzter Hand, Vol. 46).

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ H. Munro and Nora Kershaw Chadwick, *The Growth of Literature*, II, Cambridge, 1968, p. 311.

⁶⁰ Karadžić, II, No. 50, (IV), lines 10-11.

Svi mi da se u so prometnemo,
Ne bi Turkom ručka osolili.

⁶¹ Ibid., lines 55-58.

Već sve stare hodže i hadžije,
Zanatlije i mlade ćardžije,
Koji boja nu viđeli nisu,
Istom pošli da se ljebom rane.

Battle of Čokešina', carries out his mission in comic disguise, trying to keep his Orthodox faith while praying in a mosque:

I bow like a Turk, I pray like a Serb.⁶²

And when he refuses to fight unless his commander brings more troops, because, as he puts it:

I am not like a willow
To sprout new branches when I am cut down.⁶³

he makes the same anti-heroic, comic point which has often been made in the songs about Marko: in order to live one should not be prepared only to die but also perhaps to stay alive.

The sense of humour which dissolves the horror of force and violence in comic imagery and wording plays an important, if underestimated role in the epic landscape of Karadžić's collections. But it is only an alternative and sometimes a counterbalance to the high idealism and the tragic norms which are also standard in the Serbo-Croat epic tradition. There are, of course, many heroic songs which are hymns to courage and the readiness to die for one's sense of honour, analogous in their basic spirit to Roland's refusal to blow his horn. Such are, for instance, the decision of Boško Jugović to go to the battle of Kosovo and die for his sovereign, rather than obey him and stay with his sister, in 'Tsar Lazar and Tsaritsa Milica', the realization of Musić Stevan that even if he is late for the battle of Kosovo, it is never too late to die an honourable death, and, above all, Tsar Lazar's choice of the 'heavenly' rather than the 'earthly Kingdom', of honourable death in battle rather than Turkish vassalage, in 'The Downfall of the Serbian Empire'. And the same point is made against a richer historical background in the poems about heroes who go on waging a lost battle after the Kosovo disaster, poems such as 'The Death of Duke Prijezda' and 'Sick Dojčin'. The same spirit of absolute tragic values is also reflected in some poems belonging to the pre-Kosovo cycle. So, for instance, in 'Uroš and the Mrljavčevići' Jevrosima advises her son Marko to tell the truth about the right of succession to the throne, even if he has to pay with his life for it:

⁶² Karadžić, IV, No. 26, line 113. 'Turski klanjam, Srpski Boga molim.'

⁶³ Ibid., lines 100-01.

Jer ja nisam drvo vrbovina,
Kad pos'jeku, da s' omladit mogu.

Because it is better to lose your life
Than sin against your soul!⁶⁴

The line is particularly moving in its tragic spirit because it shows that a mother may be aware that there are more important things in the world than the life of her only son. It has been rightly observed that these poems from the earliest historical cycles both 'include some of the best known stories in the tradition' and 'represent the closest approach in Serbian to the medieval European model in which knightly deeds were celebrated by singers maintained at the courts of aristocratic patrons'.⁶⁵ But one should not forget that this chivalric morality sometimes survives in an outlaw setting, usually with characteristic patriarchal touches. Such is, for instance, the injunction of Starac Vujadin to his captured sons, when their arms and legs are being broken, not to betray other outlaws and those who gave them shelter.⁶⁶ Or, to take another important example, the refusal of Grujo Novaković to free himself from the Turks, because he would have to leave his son and allow him to be converted to Islam:

Through his child he surrenders to the Turks.⁶⁷

The tragic dignity of the hero is as important in Karadžić's epic landscape as the comic ridicule of mere force and violence, and they are both deeply rooted in historical realities, in social and moral norms of human conduct. However, Karadžić's collections — and the earlier extant variants suggest that they are unique in this respect — include some moments of great imaginative achievement in which the vision seems to step outside history into the region of ultimate moral transcendence. Such visionary moments deny, or ignore, actual moral norms, and they are not, as a rule, formulaic. The best known and most widely discussed issue of this kind is the moment when Banović Strahinja spares the life of his treacherous wife — either to show that his magnanimity transcends the limits of historical morality, or, perhaps, to insult his in-laws who had first refused to help him save his wife from Vlah Alija and then offered to kill her for him.⁶⁸ But the dying words of Duke Momčilo are even more interesting in this respect; betrayed by his wife and mortally wounded by his enemy, he advises him not to marry his wife, but to take his sister:

⁶⁴ *Karadžić*, II, No. 34, lines 132-33.

Bolje ti je izgubiti glavu,
Nego svoju ogr' ješiti dušu.

⁶⁵ M. P. Coote, 'Serbocroatian Heroic Songs', op. cit., p. 262.

⁶⁶ *Karadžić*, III, No. 50, lines 24-36.

⁶⁷ Ibid., No. 7, line 94. 'Kroz dete se predaje Turcima.'

⁶⁸ See *Karadžić*, II, No. 44, lines 799-808.

She will bear you a hero as I was.⁶⁹

Is there any actual historical moral norm which would imply that life itself is so much more important than an individual's life that the victim should make provision for his executioner's progeny? It is true, of course, that outlaws were expected to share their booty with the families of their comrades killed in action — and one can easily see the 'point' of this social norm. But what is the point of the dream of justice embodied at the end of 'Captain Gavran and Limo', when Starac Milija, the singer of 'Banović Strahinja', suddenly wakes up and makes Rosnić Stevan divide the booty:

How justly he divided the treasure,
Evenly among living and dead.
The living took their treasure on their backs,
The treasure of the dead remained in heaps.⁷⁰

The image is visually concrete and at the same time the expression of an abstract moral principle, so that in its metaphorical nature it embodies an 'archetype', a stylistic feature which 'occurs in the narrative of every culture, in every time period'.⁷¹ The singer does not have — and could hardly have — ready-made formulas for the expression of such a mysterious insight into a human impulse which defies historical needs. So he abandons ordinary speech, and begins to speak the language of the saints and martyrs of history who perceive a moral pattern in human destiny. Of course, such moments are statistically negligible. But are they any less important than the much more widely distributed features of Serbo-Croat heroic singing in Karadžić's collections — such as formulaic composition, the confusion of different times and settings, the mutual 'contamination' of heroes and events rooted in different historical realities, the imaginative efforts to ridicule the horror of overwhelming force and violence, the tragic flights of epic imagination which take the medieval chivalric norms to great epic heights? Or is the whole historical, linguistic, ethical and artistic epic machinery significant, above all, because it offers a few moments of transcendence of history and its standard epic projection? These moments are not only statistically marginal, but so exceptional that they elude the definition of any organized poetic system — unless, of course, we try to develop some sort of systematic theory about an epic landscape in which knights risk their lives to save the honour of their treacherous wives, victims

⁶⁹ Ibid., No. 25, line 258. 'Rodiće ti, k' o i ja, junaka.'

⁷⁰ Karadžić, III, No. 42, lines 389-92.

Kako pravo blago podijeli,
Sve na mrtva kao i na živa,
Živi svoje blago uprtiše,
A mrtvijem osta na kupove.

⁷¹ Zora Devrnja Zimmerman, 'Introduction', op. cit., p. 6.

worry about the offspring of their executioners, and much of the outlaw booty is left lying at the heads of slain heroes, where it cannot do anyone any good. Or even harm.

Chapter Three

The study of South Slav oral poetry: a select annotated bibliography of works in English (1800-1980)

CELIA HAWKESWORTH

There are three main bibliographies covering this field: Yvonne Lockwood, *Yugoslav Folklore: An Annotated Bibliography of Contributions in English*, San Francisco, 1976; V.D. Mihailovich and M. Matejić, *A Comprehensive Bibliography of Yugoslav Literature in English, 1593-1980*, Columbus, Ohio, 1984; and J.M. Foley, *Oral-Formulaic Theory and Research. An Introduction and Annotated Bibliography*, New York/London, 1985. In addition there are useful surveys and short bibliographies in several studies (e.g. Subotić, 1932; Wilson, 1970; Koljević, 1980). The present contribution is an attempt to give a brief chronological survey of the most important items in the twentieth century and a detailed account of the first echoes of the tradition as they were presented to the nineteenth-century British (and, to a lesser extent, American) reading public.

In the course of the nineteenth century there were several sparks of interest in South Slav culture, in the form of some fifteen newspaper articles and translations of popular literature (seven volumes and copious illustrations in the articles). The articles represent a serious and on the whole well-informed endeavour to introduce the popular culture of this 'most obscure corner of Europe' to the general reading public, coloured by the Romantic appeal of the 'primitive' and 'exotic'. There was a brief moment of relative renown (around 1827) and a further focus when Serbia was in the news because of the Balkan Wars at the end of the century and particularly during the First World War. But it was not until the 1930s, and notably with the work of Milman Parry and later Albert Lord, that the subject became assimilated, at least at a scholarly level, and it was possible to build on a well-established base. There is now a very substantial body of work in English.

I. 1800-1900.

1. ?1799. Sir Walter Scott translates 'Hasanaginica' on the basis of Goethe's translation of the 'Morlach' song included in Alberto Fortis'

Viaggio in Dalmazia. Scott's German was reputedly inadequate and although he himself regarded his verses as 'very dashing', he failed in several attempts to have them printed. The translation was finally discovered and published in 1924. There is general agreement that Scott contributed considerably to the reputation of South Slav poetry by failing to publish his highly poeticized version. It is of interest also that Coleridge was attracted by this poem, copied it and analysed its metre in a notebook.

2. ?1800. John Boyd Greenshields, *Selim and Zaida*, Edinburgh. Includes a superior version of 'Hasanaginica', based not only on Goethe, but also on Fortis' Italian translation. It is believed that Byron knew these 'Bosnian songs'.

3. 1821 (September). Krystyn Lach-Szyrma (C.L.S.), 'Slavonic Traditional Poetry', in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*. 'The richest and finest harvest ... has been gathered among the Sclavonian tribes under the Turkish Government.' Stresses the advantage of the South Slavs' isolation from the rest of Europe and the influence of 'foreign and refined literature'. As a Pole, Lach-Szyrma was better placed to view the field 'from the inside': his brief remarks are well-informed.

4. 1823. K. Lach-Szyrma, *Letters on Poland*, Edinburgh. Includes some pages on 'Servian' poetry and a translation ('The Nightingale'), drawing parallels with Scottish traditional songs and historical ballads.

5. 1826 (July). (John Bowring), Article II, *Narodne Srpske Pjesme, skupio i i (sic) svijet isdao Vuk Stephanovich Karatzich. Popular Servian Songs*, collected and published by V.S.K., Leipzig, 3 vols, in *The Westminster Review*. The positivist introduction (quoted in Duncan Wilson, see below) expresses the thrill of witnessing the 'dawn and progress of civilization' among a 'portion of our fellow men'. Gives an account of Servian popular poetry, drawing largely on Jacob Grimm's review of Karadžić's collection, and some examples (including 'Sedane Skadra': 'one of the most interesting romances we have met with'), pointing out that the history of the 'Servians' is contained in their poetry. Bowring describes the poetry as 'the versification of strong and simple feelings' and expresses 'the hope and the expectation, that the interesting and extensive field of the Sclavonian poetry will, ere long, be more cultivated by our countrymen; and that they will find encouragement to transplant its beauties into an English soil.'

6. 1827 (January and March). (John Gibson Lockhart), 'Translations from the Servian Minstrelsy', in *The Quarterly Review*. Review of a very small edition 'printed for private circulation'. The anonymous article and the volume itself have been convincingly attributed to Lockhart, Sir Walter Scott's son-in-law. Despite extensive searches, the volume has not been found. The article stresses the obscurity of the Illyrian provinces, and the large body of ballads 'lurking' there which 'has received much attention in Germany'. Quotes several examples, presumably translated from 'Talvj's' German versions and concludes

cautiously 'we suspect ... that [when they are known] to the general reading public of Europe, the ballads of the long-trampled Servians may be found entitled to a place not very far below those of haughtier nations ...'

7. 1827. John Bowring, *Narodne srpske pesme. Servian Popular Poetry*, London. Includes a verse dedication to Vuk Karadžić. The Introduction gives some shaky historical and linguistic data, and a sketch of Serbian literary history drawn particularly from Grimm. Bowring's account of popular poetry is typically Herderian: 'Among a people who look to music and song as a source of enjoyment, the habit of improvisation grows up imperceptibly, and engages all the fertilities of imagination in its exercise. The thought, which first finds vent in a poetical form, if worthy of preservation, is polished and perfected as it passes from lip to lip, till it receives the stamp of popular approval, and becomes as it were a national possession ... The poetry of a people is a common inheritance, which one generation transfers sanctioned and amended to another. Political adversity, too, strengthens the attachment of a nation to the records of its ancient prosperous days.' Bowring's plain translations, reproducing the metre of the original, are based on those of 'Talvj', albeit without proper acknowledgment.

The volume was favourably received and Bowring intended to produce a second volume, and perhaps a second edition, but became involved in other projects. He published several anthologies of other traditions, but the 'Servian' was widely held to be his best. His son Lewin suggests that the market for this kind of work had reached saturation point by the time Bowring's Hungarian anthology was published: 'the following amusing little squib on it' appeared in *Fraser's Magazine*:

Te Pikke Megge
Hogy, wogy, Pogy!
Xupumai trtzaaa buikttm.
Pogy, wogy, hogy!
Bsduro plgvbz ctnsttm
Wogy, hogy, Pogy!
Mle'rz vbquo'gp fvikttm.

The Pious Maiden
Holy little Polly!
Love sought me but I tricked him.
Polly little holy
You thought of me, I've nicked him!
Little holy Polly!
I'm not to be your victim.

8. 1827 (April). (?Henry Southern). Lengthy review of Bowring's anthology in *The London Magazine*, 'the most valuable and most delightful of all Bowring's anthologies'. Starts with some unease in case, following Macpherson and Mérimée, this too should be a hoax, and stresses the general English ignorance of the Balkans ('Who *are* the Servians?'). Quotes from Bowring's introduction and gives examples of the translations, comparing them with those quoted in *The Quarterly Review*. The author is particularly attracted to the lyric songs 'the delicacy, elegance and fancy of many of them are not to be excelled by the lyrical poetry of any country'. Praises Bowring for 'his poetical gifts and sympathies' and urges more translations.

9. 1827 (November). “‘The Guzla’, a Selection of Illyrian Poetry’, review of Mérimée’s *La Guzla; ou Choix de Poésies Illyriques, recueillies Dans la Dalmatie, la Bosnie, la Croatie et l’Hercegovine*, in *The Monthly Review*. An amusing article which tries to explain the discrepancy between this volume, which the author decidedly prefers, and Bowring’s by the fact that Bowring worked under numerous disadvantages, one of which was that he relied on the industry of a celebrated Servian, Vuk, and ‘a Servian himself may not be the best judge of those particular emanations of his country’s poetical genius which will most obtain the admiration of foreigners. But the little volume which we are about to notice is the work of an industrious and persevering stranger, who saw the minstrel, and listened to his strains, and who was guided in his selection of the traditionary songs of Illyria, by the impressions which they immediately left upon his own heart and imagination.’ The tone of this article is worthy of Macpherson or Mérimée themselves. One is tempted to speculate that the author was motivated by personal dislike of the generally unpopular Bowring.
10. 1844 (July) William Edmonstone Ayton, ‘Poems and Ballads of Goethe, I’, in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*. Includes ‘The Doleful Lay of the Noble Wife of Asan Aga’. One of several renderings of the poem, translated from Goethe’s translation, taking no account of the original: ‘which Goethe may possibly have altered from the Morlachian, but which is at all events worthy of his genius’.
11. 1845. ‘The Servians and their Songs’, *Chamber’s Edinburgh Journal*, May, states that the translator of *Songs from the Servian Minstrelsy* was Lockhart, the editor of *The Quarterly Review*; discusses some songs (particularly ‘Hajkuna’s Wedding’) in detail.
12. 1850. Talvj [Therese Albertine Louise von Jakob], *Historical View of the Languages and Literatures of the Slavic Nation, with a sketch of their popular poetry*, New York. While earlier commentators had tended to concentrate on the lyric poetry (possibly influenced by Goethe, who preferred it), Talvj devotes more space to the Serbian ‘heroic’ poems: ‘Indeed, what epic poetry is, how it is produced and propagated, what powers of invention it naturally exhibits — powers which no art can command — we may learn from this multitude of simple legends and complicated fables. The Servians stand in this respect quite isolated; there is no modern nation that can be compared to them in epic productiveness ... Thus, without presumption, we may pronounce the publication of these poems, one of the most remarkable literary events of modern times.’ A particularly well-informed and sensitive account of the tradition.
13. 1861. ‘Owen Meredith’ (E. Robert Bulwer, Lord Lytton), *Serbski Pesme or National Songs of Serbia*, London. An anthology of ‘poetic’ translations, relying heavily on prose versions by the French Consul, Auguste Dozon, includes a comprehensive historical introduction and some speculative personal comment, expressing a clear evolutionist

attitude in describing 'that spontaneity and unity, that evidence of collective inspiration, which has never survived the childhood of a people'. The anthology includes only one 'heroic pesma' because these songs 'abound in the description of atrocities which would be sickening to an English reader'. The translations were popular and reprinted four times. 'Meredith' was attacked in *The Saturday Review* by Lord Strangford for plagiarism and for giving a misleading impression of his own first-hand knowledge of the material. He apologised for this 'unintentional ambiguity' in his Introduction to *Orval or The Fool of Time*, where the Serbian songs were first reprinted.

14. 1874. The Rev. W. Denton, *Serbian Folk-Lore. Popular Tales* selected and translated by Madam Csedomille Mijatovies [sic], London. The introduction describes the vigour of the oral tradition in Serbia, stressing the positive vogue for folk tales from all over the known world and the evidence 'with increasing collections that they are clearly all components of one same effort'.

15. 1875. 'Servia. An Historical Sketch', *All The Year Round*, (i) 20, (ii) 27 November.

16. 1876. 'Servian Customs and Legends', *All The Year Round*, November, contains some tales and 'The Foundation of Skadar'. 'The Poetry of Servia', *Temple Bar*, an article with a distinct pro-Serbian political bias, disclaimed in an editorial comment on 'this interesting paper'. The author had travelled in Serbia and observed a singer chanting to the 'gusle'. 'The Servian [by which the author means Serbs, Bosnians, Montenegrins and Hercegovinians] ... denied all other outlets or means of civilization, and gifted with the most musical language in the world, pours out his soul in song, and has produced, and is producing, an inexhaustible store of epic and lyrical poetry of a considerable amount of merit.' 'Servia and the Slavs', *Dublin University Magazine*, four articles, October–January 1877.

17. 1877. 'Marko Kralievitch: the Mythical hero of Servia', *Macmillan's Magazine*, xxxv, January.

18. 1878. 'The literature of the Servians and the Croats', *The Westminster and Foreign Quarterly Review*, April 1. This article too was prompted by political sympathy for the Serbs, in the news because of the Balkan Wars. It is a remarkably comprehensive and scholarly survey of Serbian and Croatian literature, based largely on the lectures of Šafařík which the author had attended in Belgrade. Stating that there has been nothing worthy of notice on the subject since Sir John Bowring, the author gives a critical appraisal of Bowring and Lytton's contribution, and in particular their rendering of Serbian metres. One point made in passing is worthy of note in the light of later research: 'It is certainly a curious phenomenon that in such modern times we should find a class of Homeridae chanting to such primitive music the heroic achievements of their ancestors.'

19. 1879. Kate Freiligrath-Kroeker, 'The National Poetry of Servia', *The University Magazine*, July and December. Another serious, scholarly account by an author who does not appear to have had first-hand access to the tradition but has made a systematic study of the materials available in English, research which she states 'amply rewards the student by its revelations of unexpected beauty, pathos, and tender grace'. The author describes the heroic songs, but concentrates on the lyric. She gives an intriguing interpretation of the customs which underly 'Hasanaginica' without making any reference to the Muslim values the poem expresses — a tribute to the communicative power of this ballad even in translation and imperfectly understood.

20. 1881. *Kossovo: an attempt to bring Serbian National Songs about the fall of the Serbian Empire at the Battle of Kossovo into one Poem*, translated and arranged by Mme Elodie Lawton Mijatovich, London. The lengthy introduction to these literal but rhythmic translations gives a comprehensive account of available historical sources on the battle itself, while the second part is a detailed survey of the songs and singers. An admirably informative work, providing a starting point for several later scholars.

21. 1889. J. D. Bouchier, 'The Great Servian Festival', *The Fortnightly Review*, XLVI. An exceptionally perceptive account of the role of the Kosovo myth in the life of the South Slavs, and especially the Serbs: 'The popular imagination and the popular love of song have made up for the deficiency of authentic records. The Servian "pesmas" or heroic songs, are the real annals of the nation. They form a national epic of the highest interest and value, thoroughly indigenous, untouched by external influence, and containing at least the outlines of historical facts, while affording a vivid picture of the life, the manners, the ideas and the aspirations of former generations of the Servian race. Composed soon after the events they narrate, and in a style suited to please the audiences of the day, they have much of the fresh spontaneous charm of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* ...'

II. 1900-25.

This period saw the publication of H. M. Chadwick's *The Heroic Age* (1912), the first major comparative study of several different traditions. There were thirteen collections of Serbo-Croat traditional songs and tales and some eighteen critical articles.

i. ANTHOLOGIES: 1913: Noyes, *Heroic Ballads*; 1914: Petrovitch, *Hero Tales*; 1915: Petrovitch, *Serbian National Epic Poetry*; 1916: Velimirović, *Serbia in Light and Darkness*; Mügge, *Serbian Folk Songs, Fairy Tales and Proverbs*; R.W. Seton-Watson, *Ballads*; 1917: J.W. Wiles, *Serbian Songs and Poems*; a new edition of Meredith; 1918: a new edition of Mijatovich; a second edition of Denton; 1920: H.

Rootham, *Kossovo*; Stanoyevich, *Anthology of Yugoslav Poetry*; 1921 [and 1922]: Filmore, *Anthology of Folk Tales*; 1922: D.H. Low, *The Ballads of Marko Kraljević*.

ii. ARTICLES AND STUDIES:

There are several articles by Yugoslavs (mostly living abroad), presenting the land and its culture as they reflect the national character in the context of the political situation; and similar articles by British sympathizers, particularly between 1915 and 1917. The period also sees the first articles with an anthropological approach and the first studies by professional Slavists.

1908. Chedo Mijatovich, *Servia and the Servians*, London. An endeavour to acquaint the public with 'the inner constitution of the soul of these peoples'. Includes a detailed chapter on 'national songs'.

1909. W.B. and F. Bovill, 'Some Servian Folk-Tales and Songs', *Oxford and Cambridge Review*, viii.

1910. Prince and Princess Lazarović, *The Servian People*, London.

1912. H.M. Chadwick, *The Heroic Age*, Cambridge. The account of South Slav oral poetry is based on the work of the Matija Murko and Mme Mijatovich's *Kossovo*. Makes a comparison between the Kosovo songs and the *Iliad* (p. 313).

1913. George Rapall Noyes and Leonard Bacon, *Heroic Ballads of Servia*, Boston. 'These Kosovo songs are emphatically not fragments of a primitive epic, but ballads dealing with detached episodes. The attempts that have been made to stitch them together into a connected whole result in damaging splendid ballads without constructing an epic worthy of the name.' This sound, informative introduction is of more enduring value than Bacon's elaborate renderings: in a metre supposedly more acceptable to English ears, they bear little resemblance to the originals.

1915. 'The Ancient National Poetry of Serbia', *Literary Digest*, LI.; J. Henderson, 'Songs of Serbia', *The Welsh Outlook*, September and October, represents a real, painstaking analysis of the content and art of the songs, as they are accessible to the author in translations since Bowring; Beatrice L. Stevenson, 'The Gusle Singer and his Songs', *American Anthropologist*, 17, a confused and insufficiently rigorous article in one of the first scholarly journals to record the South Slav tradition; A. Yarmolinsky, 'The Serbian Epic', *The Bookman*, XLII, No. 3, describes the songs as the 'chief literary monument of the clash between Christianity and Mohammedanism', sound, without contributing anything new.

1916. M. Mügge, *Serbian Folk Songs, Fairy Tales and Proverbs*, London, gives an excellent, lucid, if somewhat exalted, introduction to some previously published translations; reviewed A.L. Salmon, 'Folk Poetry of the Serbs', *Outlook*, 37.

1918. T.R. Georgevitch, 'Parthenogenesis in Serbian Popular Tradition', *Folk-Lore*, March, the first narrowly focused scholarly study, considering the phenomenon in one ballad, a legend quoted by Karadžić in his dictionary and three tales.
1920. M.E. Durham, 'The Serbs as seen in their national songs', *Contemporary Review*, CXVII, gives an account of Serbian history as it is reflected in the songs, with attractive prose paraphrases.
1922. D.H. Low, *The Ballads of Marko Kraljević*, Cambridge, the sound and scholarly introduction gives a survey of nineteenth-century European interest in the tradition.
1923. L.F. Waring, 'Kosovo', *Slavonic and East European Review*, [hereafter *SEER*], II, gives a well-researched account of the history of the Kosovo songs, illustrating it, like Durham, with paraphrases.
1924. D.H. Low, 'The first link between English and Serbo-Croat literature', *SEER*, III, discusses Walter Scott's translation of 'Hasanaginica', which various foreign scholars had tried unsuccessfully to trace. The MS is at Abbotsford, and published here for the first time. 'It would be a sorry task to compare this wishy-washy verbosity with the spare, lean virility of the Serbian — or even of the German ... Yet the Morlachian Fragment, crude, feeble and emasculate as it is, marks the first recorded appearance in English of the Serbs, and forms thus a literary link not without an interest and importance of its own.' [The text of the translation is also published by W.S. Crockett in *The Scotsman*.]
1925. N. Vulich, 'The Homeric Question and the Popular Poetry of Serbia', *Philological Quarterly*, 4, discusses contradictions in the Serbian songs and Homer as proof that the Homeric epics are indeed the work of a single poet.

III. 1925–50. Since 1925, the material has become increasingly specialized. Only brief references are given here; for details of items see the bibliographies listed at the beginning of this account: Lockwood (1976); Mihailovich and Matejić (1984); Foley (1985), as appropriate.

1927. H.G. Fielder, 'The First Link between English and Serbo-Croat Literature', *SEER*, VI, gives the text of a version of 'Hasanaginica' published in *Selim and Zaida*, 1801, now attributed to the Edinburgh lawyer, John Boyd Greenshields, which predates Scott's translation. D. Subotić, 'Serbian Popular Poetry in English Literature', *SEER*, V, a thorough review of nineteenth-century sources.
1928. W.A. Morrison, 'The Revolt against the Turks: a Ballad of Karageorge', *SEER*, VI. [Also, *ibid.*, VII, 1929, VIII, 1930, and XVIII, 1939. Lockwood.]
1930. D. Subotić, 'The Origin of Serbo-Croat Ballad Poetry', *SEER*, IX, comparative study with English/Scottish ballads and a bibliography; J. Cvijić, 'Studies in Yugoslav Psychology', *SEER*, IX,

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PART TWO

THE STUDY OF SERBO-CROAT
TRADITION

Chapter Four

The poetics of the Serbian oral tradition of Vuk Karadžić

NADA MILOŠEVIĆ-DJORDJEVIĆ

Vuk Karadžić's poetics reflects his active attitude to the whole national, social, moral and artistic apparatus of Serbian oral culture. He understood this apparatus thoroughly and presented it to the world in his own way. His poetics of tradition involves, above all, a language which represents 'the sacred soul of the nation', a language which writers and educators must take into account, as the people create words and compose for general use and to communicate ideas.¹ This is the language of a 'finished' folk literature, which Karadžić takes as the basis of the literary language, and which is the basis of contemporary literary activity.² But this poetics is built on a broad view of the life, customs, beliefs and history of a people vividly preserved in oral literature.

It was through Karadžić that Serbo-Croat oral literature finally emerged on to the European cultural scene. Unlike elsewhere in Europe, it had from the beginning a steady, prolific development of which written literature could not but be aware. Created over the ages, it awaited the proper moment to be discovered. The relationship between orality and literary art, which assumes specific dimensions in the literary history of the Serbian people, calls for a special approach, both theoretically and methodologically. As far as we can ascertain today by studying the poetics of Serbian medieval literature dating from the twelfth century, or even earlier, and preserved in the lives of saints, annals, canons and translated works, the oral tradition was not only present, but existed in well-developed artistic forms (legends, folk songs, folk tales) which, owing to an overlap between the two systems, had become an integral part of medieval poetics, or were in constant touch with medieval literature. Some examples of these points of contact are the relationship between virtue and miracle in hagiographies and magic in folklore, the relationship between epic biographies and those

¹ *Sabrana dela Vuka Karadžića*, Belgrade, Vol. II, Vuk Stefanović Karadžić, *Srpski Rječnik*, 1818, Pavle Ivić (ed.), 1966 (hereafter *Sabrana dela*, Vol. II): 4, (Objavlenije, 1816).

² *Ibid.*, p. 19 (Pogovor: Pavle Ivić).

of saints — from immaculate virtue to hyperbolic physical strength, the custom of calling witnesses to testify to the truthfulness of events, the materialization of symbols, the relationship between metaphor and content.³

Renaissance writers in the Yugoslav lands held very different views of oral literature as shown in an excellent study of the poetics of tradition by Svetozar Petrović.⁴ What makes this especially significant is that it reveals the existence of an active attitude. This ranges from complete absence of any perceptible influence of popular poetry (due to a consistently negative attitude towards oral tradition), avoidance of anything that may be regarded as typical of oral narrative technique — that can only derive from the writer's intimate knowledge of it (as in the case of Marko Marulić) — to conscious functional use of those stylistic conventions of indigenous oral poetry and its poetics in general, which are compatible with the artistic conventions of the work, genre, movement (e.g. Hektorović's inclusion in his account of a fishing trip [*Ribanje i ribarsko prigovaranje*] of the long-line song [*bugarštica*] 'Prince Marko and his Brother Andrijaš'). Pursuing the same methodology, we should mention the seventeenth-century poet Ivan Gundulić's approach to Serbo-Croat oral tradition in his epic *Osman*, his abundant use of figures of speech, especially metaphors, and techniques of oral lyric and epic poetry, blending the splendid, though tragic, past of the Yugoslav peoples with an optimistic dream of the future, with proper allowance for Baroque conventions.⁵

From the fifteenth century, Christian literature, gradually waning after the Turkish invasion, turned to folklore for inspiration, assimilating its motifs, adopting compositional procedures and patriotic ideas. Oral literature almost assumed the role of written literature. In seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Serbian literature, ideas characterizing national tradition as poetic history unconsciously assumed a dominant role, drawing on the motifs and to an extent on the techniques of the oral tradition, mixing the vernacular with Church Slavonic, Slavo-Serbian and Russian Slavonic, until the vernacular assumed the status of 'the most adequate instrument of culture'.⁶

³ See Prvos Slankamenac, 'Legende o južnoslovenskim anahoretima' (*Glasnik Skopskog Naučnog Društva*, I, 1-2, Skoplje, 1926, pp. 215-35); Nada Milošević-Djordjević, *Zajednička sižejno-tematska osnova srpskohrvatskih epskih pesama i prozne tradicije*, Belgrade, 1971, pp. 128-395; Dimitrije Bogdanović, *Istorija stare srpske književnosti*, Belgrade, 1980; see also Nada Milošević-Djordjević, 'Sveti Sava u narodnim predanjima' (paper read at the Symposium on the monastery of Mileševa, Belgrade-Mileševa, 3-8 June 1985).

⁴ Svetozar Petrović, 'Poetika tradicije: Utjecaj narodne poezije u jednoj pregršti renesansnih tekstova' (*Letopis Matice srpske*, CDX 5, Novi Sad, November 1972, pp. 499-511).

⁵ Dživo Gundulić, *Osman*, in M. Pantić (ed.), Belgrade, 1967 (Predgovor: Miroslav Pantić, pp. xlv-l).

⁶ Jovan Deretić, *Istorija srpske književnosti*, Belgrade, 1983, pp. 164-72, 182-218.

Karadžić grew up in an environment in which Serbian oral literature had to be a kind of 'preserved communication', to use the term applied so successfully by Eric Havelock to Homeric epic poetry. It:

has to exist in a culture of oral communication, where if any 'useful' statement, historical, technical, or moral, is to survive, in more or less standardized form, this can be done only in the living memories of the members who make up the culture group. The epic therefore is ... to be considered in the first instance not as an act of creation but as an act of reminder and recall. Its patron muse is indeed *Mnemosyne* in whom is symbolized not just the memory considered as a mental phenomenon but rather the total act of reminding, recalling, memorializing, and memorizing, which is achieved in epic verse.⁷

It is precisely this role of epic that Karadžić emphasized in his first collection of songs in 1814. In his observations on the nature of Serbian songs at the end of the Foreword, he wrote:

It seems to me that these poems contained and still preserve among the common people the essential quality of the Serbian nation and its past.⁸

He himself belonged to the common people, to patriarchal Serbian society living in isolation for the 500 years of Ottoman occupation. The nation as a whole lived in a 'conspiracy', where memory kept each member in a close psychological relationship with the nation's forebears, as Jovan Cvijić noted:

where every man ... believes that, apart from his own ancestors, he also possesses more ancient and more honoured forefathers, namely, his kings and emperors, his revered heroes from the times of the first royal dynasty and of Kosovo ..., the brave knights and outlaws [*haiduk*] and guerrillas [*uskok*] ... There is no nobility; it was extinguished after the Battle of Kosovo and under the Turks, but still every peasant looks upon the national heroes as his very own ancestors.⁹

This historical way of thinking, cultivated diligently in Serbian medieval literature, this symbiosis of historical tradition and modern life, was brought about by the fact that Turkish rule had been reduced to administrative and physical suppression, to influences of material culture and new relations that did not affect the ideological and aesthetic consciousness, and by syntactic models of the vernacular and its poetry. Let us take, for example, the heroic tales of Turkish epic, the mythical thought of which is incompatible with acculturation on Serbian soil¹⁰ or

⁷ Eric A. Havelock, *Preface to Plato*, Cambridge, Mass., 1963, p. 91.

⁸ *Sabrana dela Vuka Karadžića*, Belgrade, Vol. I, Vuk Stef. Karadžić, *Pjesnarica 1814-1815*, V. Nedić (ed.), 1965 (hereafter *Sabrana dela*, Vol. I. *Pjesnarica*), p. 44 (Predslovie 1814).

⁹ Jovan Cvijić, *Balkansko poluostrvo i južnoslovenske zemlje*, 2nd edn, Belgrade, 1966, p. 368.

¹⁰ *Knjiga dede Korkuta, Herojski ep oguskih Turaka*, Translation, Preface, Notes and

the phenomenon of Turkisms which 'despite the multitude of words deriving therefrom' leave 'our store of words untouched' (and also our lexical framework), even among words in everyday use.¹¹ This is why Lukijan Mušicki's ode, in which he called the Serbs under Turkish domination 'turban-wearers' [*calmonosci*], angered and at the same time disheartened Karadžić. He acknowledged:

That we have turned into turban-wearers is true; but we were forced to do so by bitter and extreme need which persists to this day; yet, even in these circumstances they are Serbs who in servitude have preserved more of their national feeling than (the Serbs) here in the enlightened and free Empire.¹²

Karadžić grasps fully that the superimposed and the administrative cannot be identified with the primordial and the spiritual, and that outward manifestations are irrelevant. What is essential is an emotional identification with the historical past, national feeling, unity of tradition — the persistence 'of psychological resources latent and accessible in the consciousness of every individual ...'¹³ All these create a specific form of historical link between past, present and future which Karadžić not only understood, but also made manifest through his selection of folk myths, stories from life, epic poems and segments from the biographies of the leaders of the First and Second Serbian Uprisings in 1804-13 and 1815-17 respectively. Only two of the many examples are cited here. In the first book of *Danica*, published in 1826, Karadžić wrote descriptions of Serbian monasteries. At the end, he described the tombstone of Visoki Stefan, the son of Tsar Lazar, as 'a valuable antiquity' which 'adorns the end of the beginning' of his accounts.¹⁴ Karadjordje (Black George) hauled the tombstone to Topola, the site of the First Serbian Uprising, as if he wanted, by its material presence, to link it with the former Serbian Kingdom to mark the continuity of the Serbian being and name. In the 1829 edition of *Danica* Karadžić wrote about the courage of Miloš Stojičević, Duke of Počerin, and noted the following:

His courage was enhanced to a great degree by his thoughts of Milos Obilić who, as it is sung and told, was also from Počerin, and they say that Karadjordje reminded him of it when he named him Duke.¹⁵

Karadžić's notes on the presence of singers on all the battlefields throughout the Uprising testify to the links between the Uprising and oral poetry as an incitement and a need. Having indicated the extent to

Dictionary, S. Djindjić, Belgrade, 1981.

11 Asim Peco, *Turcizmi u Vukovim rječnicima*, Belgrade, 1987, pp. 236-40.

12 *Sabrana dela*, Vol. I, *Pjesnarica*, 1814, p. 39.

13 Havelock, op. cit., p. 44.

14 *Sabrana dela*, Belgrade, Vol. VIII; *Danica, zabavnik za godinu 1826, 1827, 1829, 1834*, M. Pavić (ed.), Belgrade, 1969, p. 52.

15 Ibid. p. 422.

which oral poetry was a part of the atmosphere in which he grew up, in his own home, Karadžić went on to describe the presence of singers in encampments on the Drina River and in Loznica (in 1804 and 1807), in Kladovo (1811), in Negotin and Brza Palanka (1811 and 1813). He wrote:

I heard songs and was eager to seek out the singers ... In Loznica in 1807, when I was a clerk to Jakov Nenadović, hardly one meal passed without a singer. Since Archpriest Nenadovic liked listening to heroic songs, our captains selected and brought forth the best singers in their companies ... Besides the various soldiers who sang for me, one of the lads from the Šabac district was kept in service as a cook mostly because he could sing to the *gusle* particularly well.¹⁶

Karadžić identified his personal relationship with oral literature, above all folk song, with the attitude of the people:

I have known [these songs] from childhood; a huge number of them; I have understood them well just as the common people have. They have been dear to me as they were to my people.¹⁷

... I memorized them without any intention of doing so ...¹⁸

In his later reflections, however, after having been introduced to European thinking, he built on to the spontaneity of his relationship with folk tradition an analytical distance. Thus we find in his texts expressions such as 'many simple Serbs believe',¹⁹ or, 'the values of our folk songs which Grimm, Goethe and Kopitar found and demonstrated to the world were not appreciated by me ...'²⁰ as 'our people do not as yet know the true value of their folk songs nor do they, for example, know the sweetness and the richness of the language they speak.'²¹

In fact, Karadžić observed in a very subtle manner that oral poetry is spontaneous, that it is a verbal expression of the spiritual culture of a people; poetry is 'a true reflection of our pure vernacular, of popular thought and customs, of the popular spirit and life and popular history...'²² It is in this context that we should interpret Karadžić's frequently quoted statement that no one among the people considers it a

¹⁶ Vuk Stefanović Karadžić, *Srpske narodne pjesme*, Vol. IV, V. Latković (ed.), Belgrade, 1958 (hereafter Vuk Stef. Karadžić, *Srpske narodne pjesme*, Vol. IV); pp. xxiii-iv, xxxi-ii.

¹⁷ *Pravi uzrok i početak sakupljanja našijeh narodnijeh pjesama*, in Vuk Stefanović Karadžić, *O srpskoj narodnoj poeziji*, B. Marinković (ed.), Belgrade, 1964 (hereafter *Pravi uzrok i početak sakupljanja*), p. 184.

¹⁸ *Sabrana dela*, Vol. I, *Pjesnarica*, p. 42 (Predslovie 1814).

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 107.

²⁰ *Pravi uzrok i početak sakupljanja*, p. 184.

²¹ Loc. cit.

²² Albert B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, Cambridge, MA, 1960, p. 102.

special skill or honour to make up a new song, but denies it, claiming to have heard it from someone else.

This attitude towards poetry has also been noted by some contemporary scholars. Albert Lord points out that 'the singers deny that they are creators of the song. They always insist on having "learned" the song from other singers'. Thus, 'the first singing in oral tradition', as Lord suggests, 'does not coincide with the concept of the "original" ... the words "author" and "original" have either no meaning at all in oral tradition or a meaning quite different from the one usually assigned to them'.²³

Although Karadžić did not analyse this observation regarding the composition of songs, it confirmed his earlier concept of poetry as a reflection of the entire culture of a people, involving everyone and not only the singer who was a part of the collective memory of the group he represented.

When singing heroic songs today *there is not one man* who does not know several songs (at least in part), and there are those who know more than fifty, and maybe hundreds.²⁴

As Havelock states, it is the way

to keep the tradition alive, to reinforce it in the collective memory of a society where collective memory is only the sum of individuals' memories, and these have continually to be recharged at all age levels.²⁵

Knowledge of poetry and oral tradition in general is part of the comprehensive oral education acquired through the ages by means of oral communication, of 'training and knowledge'.²⁶ In this respect Karadžić's words to Serbian writers are characteristic:

One must recognize and understand a song ... but for our modern writers this is rather difficult. I hope that none of the intelligent will take offence at me, nor feel ashamed because of these words, because it is no disgrace to know what one has not learned ...²⁷

Having a knowledge of the real situation regarding tradition and the processes of its creation and preservation, induced and inspired by European scholarship, the achievements of which he absorbed with all his senses, Karadžić gradually adopted only those elements that were

²³ Ibid. p. 101.

²⁴ *Sabrana dela*, Belgrade, Vol. IV, Vuk Stefanović Karadžić, *Srpske narodne pjesme* I, V. Nedić (ed.), 1975 (hereafter *Sabrana dela*, Vol. IV), p. 560 (Karadžić's Preface to Leipzig edn, 1923); author's emphasis.

²⁵ Havelock, op. cit., p. 44.

²⁶ Vuk Stef. Karadžić, *Srpske narodne pjesme*, Vol. IV, p. xxx (Karadžić's Preface to 2nd edn, Vienna, 1833).

²⁷ Loc. cit.

appropriate to his own experience. He continued to adhere to the *Kunst und Volkspoesie* division (learned versification and folk poetry), but soon abandoned the notion of folk poetry as a 'godly inspiration' which he had adopted in the *Mala Prostonarodnja Slaveno-serbska Pjesnarica*²⁸ namely of 'poetry which the heart created spontaneously in its simplicity and innocence'.²⁹ He used and elaborated Herder's idea of the existence of talented individuals among the people who created songs and of those who corrupted them in transmission.³⁰ Karadžić described the functioning of the whole system of oral tradition by which songs were transmitted from one singer to another:

The different performance of the same songs among the people shows that all songs do not immediately assume their final form; the singer creates a song as best he can and then, as it passes from mouth to mouth, the song grows and is adorned; sometimes it is damaged. But usually different singers adapt it in their fashion, as is still done today.³¹

Karadžić also noted the importance of a singer's individual talent. In his formulation that a person who knows fifty different songs can easily sing a new one (which is very important for his views on oral poetry as a kind of 'learning'), he adds, as an essential condition 'if he is cut out for that sort of endeavour'.³² Karadžić's concept of talent is illustrated by his definition of a good singer as 'one who has a proper and distinct knowledge of songs ... who takes care about order and meaning, who understands, feels and thinks what he says'. Karadžić went even further. He was the first to perceive singers as performers of oral art and as individual creators. He was, as Nikola Banašević notices, the first to discuss one of the fundamental scholarly issues in observing old epics — the problem of singers and their role in creating heroic epics.³³

It was Karadžić who first attempted a characterization of the singers. He explained in his Foreword that he did so 'for many reasons', but placed emphasis on his own fundamental preoccupation — the language, 'especially because of some differences in language that make it necessary to know from whom (each) song has been copied and the region it came from ...'³⁴ However, he clearly indicated in the

²⁸ Nikola Banašević, 'Ranija i novija nauka i Vukovi pogledi na narodnu epiku' (*Prilozi za književnost, jezik, istoriju i folklor*, Vol. XXX, 3-4, Belgrade, 1964, pp. 171-73); see also Dragiša Živković, *Evropski okviri srpske književnosti*, Belgrade, 1970, pp. 11-75, 119-46 and Miljan Mojašević, *Jakob Grim i srpska narodna književnost* [Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti, Posebna izdanja, Vol. DLIII, Belgrade, 1983].

²⁹ *Sabrana dela*, Vol. I, p. 42.

³⁰ Mojašević, op. cit., p. 204.

³¹ *Sabrana dela*, Vol. IV, pp. 566-67 (Karadžić's Preface to Leipzig edn, 1823).

³² *Ibid.*, p. 560.

³³ Banašević, op. cit., p. 176.

³⁴ Karadžić, *Srpske narodne pjesme*, Vol. IV, p. ix.

Foreword that he regarded singers as creators differing from one another; he divided them according to their background and the way it affected their repertoire, according to their mode of interpretation (singers and narrators), and on the basis of their individual talents (good or bad). Of special interest is the distinction Karadžić made between the 'men's' songs serving for entertainment and the serious ones preserving the central tradition. As indicated in his Draft Foreword preserved in the Archives of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Karadžić memorized a much larger number of men's songs serving for entertainment than he originally published. These were for the most part 'satirical' songs about local events, unsuccessful abductions of maidens, broken marriages, comic portrayals of individuals and specific regions. Karadžić mentioned as singers of such songs 'a certain *haiduk*' who sang about the villages he passed through, and Arsenije Stanojević of Mačva, a young lad of twenty-five years for whom Karadžić bought a *gusle*.³⁵ Karadžić recalled also his uncle Toma and underlined that those songs which 'do not deal with any important or well-known events ... do not spread further, but remain where they first appeared until they are forgotten'.³⁶ However, their oral technique was identical with classic epic poetry. In consequence, Karadžić noted that:

it was easier to understand how our heroic songs were created and still are created today ... As merry old men and young lads make up these satirical songs, so do others, like Filip Višnjić for example, sing about heroic battles and other significant events — all these new songs about the recent Serbian war against the Turks.³⁷

On the subject of historical songs in Karadžić's *Second Song Book*, Lord noted that Karadžić was really the first to seek and publish new songs, mostly those sung by the traditional singers of his time.³⁸ We may add that Karadžić was able to do so because he was aware of the importance of the historical moment: he discovered and understood the nature of song performance, and hence knew what was to be expected of singers.

Concerning a song performed by his uncle Toma, Karadžić wrote that in 1803 he watched how:

while working in the field, he mumbled, making up a song about the death of Smail-Beg Begzadić who had been killed in a battle four or five days earlier,

³⁵ Karadžić's MS No. 8552/45a-VII. Arsenije Stanojević is obviously the same person as the cook whom Karadžić had mentioned as a particularly good singer (cf. note 16).

³⁶ *Sabrana dela*, Vol. IV, p. 563.

³⁷ Karadžić MS, loc. cit.

³⁸ Albert B. Lord, 'Vuk Karadžić i istorijska pesma', *Naučni sastanak slavista u Vukove dane*, Vol. 2, Belgrade, 1972, p. 99.

then, sitting down to rest, beckoned me and with a smile began to narrate.³⁹

It is of interest to note Lord's observations of the same procedure regularly followed by a singer who first sang for himself: 'He does this in performance not before an audience at first, of course, but by himself ... It has been so with all singers since time immemorial ...'⁴⁰ The only audience at this point was Karadžić himself, but whether the song continued to live on we do not know. What is important is that Karadžić memorized it and recorded it entirely. His uncle Toma — it should be mentioned — was a singer and was therefore able to sing the song in an instant according to the formula prescribed for this type of song depicting a clash between two battling armies (e.g. the cry of the *vila* announcing the arrival of the enemy from three sides, the writing of letters). Indeed, Karadžić himself could not have memorized the song had he not been familiar with the type.

Without using the modern folkloristic term, Karadžić introduced variants in his collections and registered them in three ways: by repeating the title of the preceding song and adding the word 'again' in front of it without repeating the (song) title, by using the syntagma 'the same again, but different' (for variants containing substantial differences), and, finally, by applying the syntagma 'the same again, but somewhat different' (for variants containing smaller differences).⁴¹ Karadžić also discussed variants in his Preface to the Leipzig edition.⁴² In fact, he made a clear distinction between 'the different singing of songs among the people' — obviously having in mind 'stories which quite agree' ('in which differences are small') and which were transmitted from one singer to another⁴³ — and songs about 'the same event' which 'by different persons were made different'. In his simple manner, Karadžić had in fact noted the phenomenon of polygenesis. He cited as an example:

two songs, both from the Second Song Book about Naod Simeun and also two from the same book, telling how Marko Kraljević recognizes his *father's sword* ... and two from the Third Song Book about the *wedding of Janković Stojan* ...

and added that 'several songs may be found on almost every single event'.⁴⁴

Karadžić's observations about the concept of the theme or story

³⁹ *Sabrana dela*, Vol. IV, pp. 565-66.

⁴⁰ Lord, op. cit., p. 37.

⁴¹ Cf. Ibid., 'Varijante Vukovih pesama onda i sada' (*Naučni sastanak slavista u Vukove dane*, Vol. 17, Belgrade, 1987. Paper read at the Meeting, in Belgrade, 14 September 1987).

⁴² *Sabrana dela*, Vol. IV, pp. 553-83.

⁴³ Cf. Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, p. 101.

⁴⁴ *Sabrana dela*, Vol. IV, pp. 566-67.

(*pripovijetka*) are of particular importance. In his observations of two songs telling the story of the bridegroom turned into a snake and sung by two different singers, Karadžić noted: '[*U pripovjetki*] Regarding the story both agree considerably'⁴⁵ and then proceeded to retell the story and point out the differences. Karadžić's comparison of performance language with speech is of vital importance: 'Just as one person speaks better and more clearly than another, so also does he sing and tell songs better than another.'⁴⁶ A fleeting observation at first, which most probably forced itself upon him as he listened to good and bad singers alike, it was later elaborated into a subtle distinction between everyday language and the language of verbal art, which as 'preserved communication' made it possible for him to introduce the language of verbal art as the foundation of modern Serbian written literature.⁴⁷

Karadžić wrote frequently of folk songs as the 'most sacred values' and:

mirrors of the gentle and masculine Serbian spirit, an example of the sweetness of simple and lofty expressions of the Serbian language ... and too great an inclination to poetry.⁴⁸

with the awareness also that they:

have brought our people ... glory and praise and that in the learned world they were applauded and acclaimed and thus the name of our people made known and celebrated more than by any other means.⁴⁹

All these statements emphasize his need to make known and print only those examples representing perfection of language and ideas. It is for this reason that he prepared an anthology and allowed himself to make slight 'corrections' in some parts of the songs. From the standpoint of modern folkloristics, this was certainly inadmissible. But from Karadžić's point of view, it was a necessity, for it was the only way in which the songs could reflect the standard language, 'the creation of supra-dialectal forms', and 'in which their stories could not be in conflict with common sense', the logic of thoughts and feelings.⁵⁰ With his knowledge of the grammar of oral poetry, although he did not consider himself a singer, Karadžić was able to memorize songs as they were memorized by singers and audiences. He knew the entire stock of formulas and the proper mode of their application. Today, in the light of the Parry-Lord oral-formulaic theory, it is quite common to consider a singer incapable if he mechanically repeats formulas learned from

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 574; author's emphasis.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 566.

⁴⁷ Karadžić, *Srpske narodne pripovijetke*, M. Bašić (ed.), Belgrade, 1928 (hereafter *Srpske narodne pripovijetke*), p. xx (Karadžić's Preface 1852).

⁴⁸ *Sabrana dela*, Vol. I, p. 362 (Objavljenije o narodnoj srpskoj pjesnarici, 1815).

⁴⁹ *Sabrana dela*, Vol. IV, p. 545 ('Objavljenije' of Vienna edn, 1840).

other singers. In Karadžić's time, however, it was perceptive to note the necessity of a functional and dynamic use of words repeated in songs, and this is precisely what he observed.

Is this not the beginning of 'observing the grammar of poetry, a grammar superimposed, as it were, on the grammar, of the language concerned', namely of the idea that 'an oral poetic language follows the same principles as the language itself ...'⁵¹ Lord held that those who mechanically put together formulas acquired from other singers never became singers themselves.⁵² It is interesting to note that Karadžić actually thought it foolish of a singer 'who, without knowing what he was saying, collected words from other songs and put them ... where they should not have been'.⁵³ Accordingly, he cited a song in the 1832 *Ružica* Calendar, in which the sister who poisoned her brother's slayer uttered the words:

I would rather be food for sea fish,
Than love my brother and my bitter foe.⁵⁴

Here the singer had incorrectly and illogically applied the established formula about the suicide of a maiden who did not wish to marry by force, because her suitor was a bitter foe, the slayer of her brother or simply because he was not her 'beloved'. Karadžić then cited as a contrasting affirmative example the song about the sister of Ljutica Bogdan in which the words of the formula were functional, i.e. they were placed where they should be. After he had slain her brother Bogdan, the suitor carried the maiden away. On the way to her future bridegroom's home, when the wedding company reached the sea, the maiden requested that her veil be unwound on the pretence that she might wash, and then she jumped into the sea crying:

I would rather be food for sea fish,
Than the wife of my brother's slayer.⁵⁵

When the song about Suickina Mara from Sinj was published, Karadžić evoked an identical traditional legend from Kosovo, which he proposed, as far back as 1829, as subject-matter for a Serbian novel.⁵⁶ 'I was tremendously happy,' he wrote in his comments on the song, 'when I

⁵⁰ Karadžić, *Srpske narodne pjesme*, Vol. IV, p. xxviii.

⁵¹ Lord, op. cit., p. 36.

⁵² Ibid., p. 37.

⁵³ Karadžić, *Srpske narodne pjesme*, Vol. IV, p. xxix.

⁵⁴ Volim biti morskoj ribi rana
Neg ljubiti bracu i dušmana (loc. cit.)

⁵⁵ *Sabrana dela*, Vol. IV, Song No. 722, p. 446:
Volim biti morskim ribam' rana,
Nego ljuba moga brata krvnika. Cf. p. 650.

found a song on this subject in Dalmatia.⁵⁷ Namely, it is the story of a maiden who is uncertain which of two shepherds she should marry: 'both being handsome and very dear to me'. Finally, she decides to make her choice after a running contest between her two suitors. The contestants are to run a race from both ends of a long and arduous path, in the middle of which she would stand, and the first to reach her would be the one she would marry. Both contestants die from exhaustion and the maiden, stricken with grief, kills herself.

The tragic death of all three characters in the action, which in itself is a sufficiently persuasive end of the story, most probably induced Karadžić to conclude that the last eleven lines of the song 'were added from different songs'.⁵⁸ For instance, from Song 597, entitled 'Mother, Sister and Wife', the final lines functionally confirm a degree of emotional closeness among the characters that has been previously expressed. What is significant today, however, is that these eleven lines are in fact formulaic, differing only slightly in these two songs in the order of words and the lines, and, of course, in the characters' names:

Three wretched women lament,
The first laments at dawn and at dusk,
The second laments when it strikes her fancy,
The third laments unceasingly;
The one who laments at dawn and at dusk,
She is the mother of the maiden Mara;
The one who laments when it strikes her fancy,
She is Petar's old step-mother;
The one who laments unceasingly,
She is Nikola's old mother.⁵⁹

56 *Sabrana dela*, Vol. VIII, *Gradja za lep srpski roman*, p. 423.

57 *Sabrana dela*, Vol. IV, p. 482.

58 Loc. cit.

59 *Sabrana dela*, Vol. IV, Song No. 597, p. 385:

Zakukaše do tri kukavice:
Jedna kuka, jutrom i večerom,
Druga kuka, kad joj na um padne,
Treća kuka, nigda ne pristaje;
Koja kuka jutrom i večerom,
To je majka Mare dijevojke;
Koja kuka kad joj na um padne,
To je stara Petrova maćija;
Koja kuka, nigda ne pristaje,
To je stara Nikolina majka.

60 Ibid., Song No. 730, p. 482:

Zakukaše do tri kukavice:
Jedna kuka, nikad ne prestaje,
Druga kuka jutrom i večerom,
Treća kuka kad joj na um padne;
Koja kuka, nikad ne prestaje,
To je jadna Jovanova majka;
Koja kuka jutrom i večerom

Three wretched women lament:
 The first laments unceasingly
 The second laments at dawn and at dusk,
 The third laments when it strikes her fancy;
 The one who laments unceasingly,
 She is Jovan's poor mother,
 The one who laments at dawn and at dusk
 She is Jovan's grieving sister;
 The one who laments when it strikes her fancy,
 She is Jovan's young wife.⁶⁰

In the course of the editing process Karadžić demonstrated a very characteristic relationship with 'formulacity' (I venture to use this term and to associate it with Karadžić). A careful study of this procedure reveals an oral laboratory placed at Karadžić's disposal which he used in a very thoughtful and knowledgeable way. The model was based on the performance of good singers and the fashion in which they applied the formula taking care to employ a given 'group of words under the same metrical conditions, to express a given essential idea'.⁶¹ Karadžić in fact used the material meaningfully 'in other songs known to him from the same or related cycle'.⁶² To cite only a few examples: Karadžić in Song 719 changed the irregular line *ja sam joj teo obljubiti lice* (I wanted her face to caress) to a regular decasyllable *ja sam teo obljubiti joj lice* (I want to caress her face).⁶³

In Song 323,⁶⁴ he changed the lines:

Da vidite kako ljudi kažu,	For you to see what people say,
Ako bude istina prava	If it were the honest truth

into a more concrete, more logical and common pattern:

Da vidite lijepu djevojku,	For you to see the fair maiden
Ako bude, kako ljudi kažu	If it were, as people say

In Song 376, the epithet 'fair' was replaced by the traditional epithet 'willowy'.⁶⁵ Without going into Karadžić's amendments of the language, the creation of a supra-dialectical standard, as Gerhard Gesemann would say, was limited solely to Karadžić's use of 'the grammar of poetry'.

To je tužna Jovanova seja;
 Koja kuka, kad joj na um padne,
 To je mlada Jovanova ljuba.

⁶¹ Lord, op.cit., p. 30.

⁶² *Sabrana dela*, Vol. IV, p. 654 (V. Nedić, Pogovor).

⁶³ Ibid., p. 651.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 653.

⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 647-48.

In Song 207 about the wife of the rich man Gavan, Karadžić added the established form of repetition in oral poetry, to describe the performance of events which had been expressed in the preceding lines as a future probability. He also changed the order of the lines and placed them in a more logical succession:

Carve the little *gusle*,
 From dry maple,
 From the gates of heaven,
 Wherefrom the sun rises,
 Then journey around the world,
 Like a bee around the flower,
 Then tempt all faiths,
 And all cities one after the other.

They carved the little *gusle*,
 From dry maple,
 They journeyed around the world,
 Like a bee around the flower,
 From the gates of heaven,
 Wherefrom the sun rises,
 Then tempted all faiths,
 And all cities one after the other.⁶⁶

Without attempting to analyse the method employed by the oral singer or to draw any theoretical conclusions, Karadžić simply improved the song by using and creating formulas.

Karadžić was obviously not in a position to be able to comprehend the meaning of formula as used by Parry and Lord. Nevertheless, the significance of his work lies in the fact that he perceived that 'words from other songs' must not be employed mechanically and that he noticed the existence not only of the thematic stock of tradition, but the manner in which the song was actively created and transmitted.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 648:
 Sadjelajte guslice,
 Od suvoga javora,
 Od Božijeg prozora,
 Od sunčevog istoka,
 Pa podjite po svetu,
 Kao pčela po cvetu,
 Te kušajte sve vere,
 I sve redom gradove.

Sadeljaše guslice,
 Od suvoga javora,
 Pa podjoše po svetu,
 Kao pčela po cvetu,
 Od Božijeg prozora,
 Od sunčevog istoka,
 Te kušaju sve vere,
 I sve redom gradove.

A view prevails in scholarly circles that Karadžić was never interested in oral tales or oral legends to the same degree that he was in folk poetry. Moreover, after a statement made by Vuk Vrčević, it was generally believed that anecdotes and comic tales remained completely outside his range of interest. However, at the very beginning of his work, Karadžić included in his dictionary of 1818 a series of comic tales, for the most part humorously reflecting the spirit of the time and the national character, as well as several demonological, aetiological, cultural and historical legends.⁶⁷ His interest in the latter began in the First and Second Song Books. In 1814, he published several legends about Prince Marko (along with Song 2), and in 1815, about the outlaws: Starina Novak, Radivoje and Grujica (with Song 9) and Baja Pivljanin (with Song 11). In his 1821 collection of folk tales, he introduced twelve, for the most part short tales. These included nine comic tales, a longer 'novel', an aetiological legend, and an animal tale, but not a single fairy-tale. The fact is that his new collection of oral tales was published thirty-two years later. The reason for such a long interval is explained in Karadžić's Foreword to the Dictionary, as well as in the first collection of 1821. His purpose was 'to explain and describe in the best possible manner what people say about the words they formulate in their minds', in such a way 'that nothing should be added or made up'.⁶⁸ However, this conception demanded exceptional effort, especially 'the writing of folk tales'. Karadžić concluded: 'I have taken as much trouble over some of these short ones as some writers might take to write a whole novel, or to translate all of Salomon Gessner's idylls into Serbian.'⁶⁹

From the very beginning, with the premiss that tales should 'serve as a model of the vernacular in prose',⁷⁰ namely, as the foundation of modern written prose, Karadžić was aware of the need to use correct syntax, or, in his own definition, 'the rules combining words into discourse (rules on how to create conversations out of words)'.⁷¹ He was also aware of the oral tale as a special distinctive genre. In the dictionary Karadžić wrote of the realistic men's oral tales 'that they are so conceived that one would believe them to be true'.⁷² Elsewhere, writing more generally, he made a distinction, as already mentioned, between the vernacular and the language of oral tales. Understanding the complexity of the task before him, he continuously postponed publication of the tales until 1853, when he printed the ones which:

⁶⁷ *Sabrana dela*, Vol. II, pp. 94-95.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. viii-ix (Karadžić's Preface).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. ix.

⁷⁰ *Srpske narodne pripovijetke*, p. 350 (Objavljenije, 1852).

⁷¹ *Sabrana dela*, Vol. XII, *O jeziku i književnosti I*, B. Nikolić (ed.), Belgrade, 1968, p. 33 (Pismenica serbskoga jezika).

⁷² *Sabrana dela*, Vol. II, p. ix.

the young people, both lads and lasses, and elderly men and women would read with joy, not only because of the purity of the vernacular, but also because of national sentiments in this genre of oral art.⁷³

Still somewhat uncertain, in a dedication to Kopitar in 1853, Karadžić expected assurances that 'the folk tales, like the folk songs, are worthy of the Serbian people'. He was much more responsive to the songs 'which contained in themselves the essence of Serbian life' as 'accomplished folk literature'. He did not consider the folk tales to be a true reflection of the national spirit, as they were perceived in his time by Jovan Subotić⁷⁴ or Atanasije Nikolić.⁷⁵ To be considered as such, they had to be recorded exactly and 'the ideas and words placed' not according to one's taste, but in consonance with the nature of the Serbian language.⁷⁶ This was obviously a tedious and ungratifying task and one of very long duration. 'However easy this task may seem, it is very extensive and long.'⁷⁷

To Karadžić, the poetics of the tale was a model of the poetics of written prose in terms of language and style ('one must think and arrange words'), structure and genre ('in this category of folk verbal art of our people'), and subject matter ('with respect to popular thinking'). Generally dissatisfied with the material he had either collected or received from story tellers, Karadžić set out to 'stylize' the folk tales, to a greater or lesser degree, in order to meet all three requirements that he had himself established as a model of verbal art in prose.

The situation was even more complex in the case of the legends. At first, Karadžić did not know the exact meaning of the term as used by Grimm and Kopitar.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, he used legends to illustrate the epic biographies of heroes, historical and geographical localities and events, and traditional beliefs and customs. He also used them to explain the creation or existence of real or imagined phenomena and beings. Studying the manner in which Karadžić used legends, what is most striking is their predominantly explanatory role. Having sensed this tendency, Karadžić used them precisely in this manner, but within the context of much broader conceptions, as an auxiliary method, always taking care to preserve their traditional scheme, and without entering into their 'credibility'. To cite one of many examples, concerning the legend about Prince Marko's death Karadžić pointed out that 'many simple-minded Serbs and Bulgarians are trying to prove that he still

⁷³ *Srpske narodne pripovijetke*, p. 350.

⁷⁴ *Serbski Letopis*, VII, 26, pp. 121-22.

⁷⁵ Atanasije Nikolić, *Narodne srpske pripovedke*, I-II, 1842-43 (Predgovor).

⁷⁶ *Srpske narodne pripovijetke*, p. xx (Preface, 1821).

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. xix.

⁷⁸ *Vukova prepiska*, I, p. 587.

lives in a cave ... and that he will reappear ...'⁷⁹ This statement reveals his intuitive and empirical understanding of the nature of legend-telling: a conviction on the part of the narrators of the credibility of the story they tell and their sense of the need to prove it. Karadžić was aware that legends, particularly those with a well developed plot, were very close to oral tales and thus he included a number of them in his 1853 collection of tales. In his unpublished book *Život i običaji naroda srpskoga* Karadžić included other legends, as already pointed out by M. Bošković-Stulli.⁸⁰ These legends were presented in three separate chapters, coinciding exactly with three classification groups which were recognized internationally in 1963.⁸¹ In the chapter entitled 'How Things are Created', Karadžić included aetiological legends, in the chapter 'Beliefs in Non-Existent Things', demonological/mythological legends, and in the chapter 'Heroes and their Horses', historical and cultural legends.

As in many instances discussed above, by separating all the legends into categories — with the exception of legends belonging to written literature and originating from apocryphas and hagiographies — Karadžić not only came very close to, but even anticipated some modern approaches to contemporary folklore research. The fact that he did not have modern theoretical terminology at his disposal does not in the least diminish the significance of his clearly expressed ideas and the conclusions he reached.⁸²

⁷⁹ *Sabrana dela*, Vol. I, pp. 107-08.

⁸⁰ Maja Bošković-Stulli, 'O terminologiji hrvatskosrpske narodne pripovijetke', in *III Kongres folklorista Jugoslavije*, Cetinje, 1958, p. 130.

⁸¹ *Acta Ethnographica*, XIII, 1-4, Budapest, 1964.

⁸² Jovan Deretić, 'Vukova poetika', in *Ogledi iz narodnog pesništva*, Belgrade, 1978, p. 108.

Chapter Five

The collections of oral lyric (women's songs) arranged and published by Vuk Karadžić: the earliest ritualistic layers

HATIDŽA KRNJEVIĆ

The oldest record of a lyric couplet in Serbo-Croat (Dubrovnik, 1462)¹ allows us to move the dating of Serbo-Croat lyric folk poetry as recorded text further back into the past. This poetry has been recorded in the territory of the former Yugoslavia continuously for more than half a millennium. This does not mean, however, that the date of recording is the date of the song's origin. Recorded text is only one of the possible forms of songs composed orally, sung, altered and transmitted through the centuries.

Unfortunately, in spite of their evident continuity, age and quality, women's songs have almost always been a marginal interest of literary history and they remain so today. This is so even with the best songs, the collection assembled by Vuk Karadžić. Folklorists and specialists in Slavic studies have been concerned mostly with epic or 'heroic' songs. It is certainly the case that the heroic poetry published by Karadžić, in addition to its evident artistic value, also had wider, non-literary significance. As shown elsewhere in this book, those songs played an important role in the period of the awakening and maturing of national awareness in the liberation struggles during the first half of the nineteenth century, first in Serbia and later elsewhere. Important names and major contributions to the history and poetics of heroic poetry could be enumerated at length, from the last century right through to the oral-formulaic theory of Milman Parry and Albert Bates Lord in our own time. However, with respect to lyric poetry, a survey of the studies of its history and poetics could be completed very quickly and the outcome would be very meagre indeed.

Should the role that lyric folk song plays in our lives, in the broadest sense, be overlooked? After all, it is an organic part of human life, an art form that accompanies human actions from birth till death, from lullabies to lamentations. Oral lyric song contains the reality of

¹ Published by M. Pantić, 'Manji prilozi za istoriju naše stare književnosti i kulture' (*Zbornik Matice srpske za književnost i jezik*, 19, No. 1, 1971).

everyday life and work, an entire galaxy outside the interests of epic singers. It also touches deeper layers of the human psyche: it has given form to man's primeval fear and impotence in the face of the miracle of the elemental energy of nature, and the mystery of the cycle of birth and death. Lyric songs do not speak of the glory of epic heroes from the past, they mould the inner life of human emotions and situations, both permanent and significant for all people and through all times. Lyric song is a form of the single universal language of humankind — as Erich Fromm defined the forgotten language of symbols. Through its specific logic and syntax, by associations and analogies, oral lyric expresses inner feelings and states as events in the outer world. The universal character of lyric songs is clear since men and women, whatever the circumstances and society they live in, are always faced with the same issues: the fear of death and impenetrable metaphysical forces. What would our oral tradition be like if it contained only the monotonous sound of heroic hyperbole of the epic songs without the soft lyric melody that sings of both the beauty and the tragedy of man's short stay on earth? Heroic times are the past, the lyric is always the present.

An early antecedent of Karadžić was the accomplished fifteenth-century poet, Juraj Šižgorić (c. 1420-1509). It is to him that we owe the first terminological definition and classification of purely lyric genres, as well as their first aesthetic assessment. Šižgorić described, but unfortunately failed to note down *lamentations* (*nenias*). The first person to record these was Karadžić three centuries later. Šižgorić also mentioned another cycle of family-ritual songs: *wedding songs* (*epithalamia*), and in addition, he referred to love songs, and songs sung to accompany various forms of work. Wedding and love songs were recorded at approximately the time they were first mentioned, in the fifteenth century. Šižgorić did not hesitate to value women's songs in his native language more highly than Classical Greek and Roman poetry of which he was also a keen admirer. Šižgorić's description is significant in that he presented the women's songs in their natural context: as the accompaniment of burial and wedding ritual, and wedding dance. He referred to the songs' praise of love and to the way in which their rhythms governed the pace of human labour. Šižgorić did not mention any epic songs, tales or heroes. It is clear that oral lyric deserves far more serious attention than it has had so far. Karadžić suspected this at the very outset of his work. Women's songs were the first examples of folklore that he published. Although himself an 'epic' personality in intellect and in the scope of his reforms, let us not forget that the first voice in which he sang was, so to speak, lyrical.

The most important of Karadžić's records of the oldest ritual songs are the collections of women's songs (*Mala prostonarodnja slaveno-serbska pjesnarica*, Vienna 1814; *Narodna srbska pjesnarica*, Vienna

1815, *Narodne srpske pjesme*, Leipzig 1824; *Srpske narodne pjesme*, Vienna 1841). Relevant materials are also to be found in his other writings, especially those on lexicography and ethnology.

As early as the 1815 collection, essentially new elements come to light: first the songs were not memorized and recorded *post festum*, as was the case with the 1814 collection, which was *written* in Vienna. The 1815 songs were recorded from *living singers* in an authentic social context; secondly, the thematic unity of the first collection, which contained mostly love songs, was broken in the second collection through the introduction of archaic ritual lyrics. This change in context brought to light an entirely new, and very old area of lyric reality. The tender beauty of the poetry of rituals and their part-pagan, part-Christian spirituality, combined with the lyrical mediation of expression through indirect statement, gave Karadžić's second collection an essentially new quality.

The Whitsun songs, *Kraljičke pesme*, for example, taken as a separate whole within the framework of ritual dance, belong to the cycle of ancient songs related to the natural, solar calendar of the old agricultural year, reckoned according to the four positions of the sun. These songs, glorifying the rebirth of life in nature, are among the most beautiful ritual songs which accompanied pagan spring festivals within the framework of the widespread fertility cult. When they were first published, the Whitsun songs introduced an entirely new world of ritual preserved in the lyric form of *collective monologues*. Karadžić's first *ethnological records*, his descriptions of the accompanying customs and the songs, appeared in this same collection almost three years before his *Dictionary* became established as the major source of ethnological and folklore data. There are distinct traces of mythic thought and enduring archaic beliefs, not only in the ritual songs, but also in the non-ritual ones that Karadžić included in his opus.

The value of the first edition of the *Dictionary* (1818) as a source of ritual songs lies in the descriptions of items relating to ritual. Even more important than this is the fact that the *Dictionary* includes certain genres of ritual songs missing from the first two collections, and also omitted from the 1824 Leipzig edition. These genres appeared only in the last Vienna edition of 1841. In other words, the list of ritual genres is richer and fuller in the first edition of the *Dictionary* than in either the collections which preceded it or the later Leipzig collection of 1824. In the 1824, edition six of the seven lyric cycles contain traditional ritual, for the most part pagan in character; in addition there are also some Christian materials. The last collection of lyric songs, published in Vienna in 1841, is the crowning achievement of work in this area of oral tradition. In this collection Karadžić classified his rich materials into twenty cycles, fifteen of which represent a world of the ritual past. In addition to publishing materials only recorded hitherto in the *Dictionary* of 1818, it also brings to public attention unknown ritual

songs. Karadžić introduces the concept of a cycle of *mythological songs* (*pjesme osobito mitologičke*) in the last collection, although songs with mythological content may also be found outside that specific cycle.

Collectively, the various sources mentioned above, including the second edition of the *Dictionary* (1852) and the ethnological records, represent the fulfilment of Karadžić's idea, undoubtedly encouraged by the advice of Kopitar and Jacob Grimm, to locate living examples of the ancient heritage and to publish them for the first time in a form that met the scholarly criteria of the day. In this way Karadžić was able to show the nature of the core of materials from which various lyric song types had emerged, developed and endured more or less uninterruptedly until our times. Karadžić brought that genesis and its phases to light. He was able to demonstrate that there is an underlying historic process by which layer upon layer of culture has accumulated through the ages, permeated by the idea of the unity of man and nature and the comforting belief that death signifies not the end of life but its continuation. Both the ritual and non-ritual songs contain reflections of mythic consciousness, belief in word magic: all those features which point to the genetic links of lyric poetry with ritual and myth.

In the last collection of women's songs of 1841, the calendar-ritual and the family-ritual songs grew, both in genre and in number, into a whole lyric mythology. Passing through that world of poetry of brilliant ritual imagination, we see that through his selection, enumeration and classification of songs, Karadžić has given an arch-like picture of the developmental phases of the religious consciousness, from pagan ritual dance and songs to the point at which the early models become buried under new layers of civilization and history. Karadžić's ritual songs can be seen as pieces of a mosaic of primeval beliefs as created and restored by the reality of life, as recalled and nurtured by the collective memory, the universal laboratory in which human experience undergoes artistic processing in the language of the people. Karadžić's collections of women's songs and other lyric sources, seen in temporal sequence, show an ever deeper and more comprehensive range, offering a kind of lyric 'anthropology' formed and preserved by the oral word according to its own rules.

Karadžić systematized the lyric heritage existing since time immemorial. His work is invaluable. His clear understanding of the sequence of songs enabled later scholars to identify much older materials and classify them into cycles. It is not only what is new in Karadžić's collections that is of importance, but also that which takes us by way of association into the world of the remote past. This not only confirms historical continuity, but also validates the authenticity of Karadžić's recordings in which the earlier layers of traditional poetry are reflected, as in a mirror.

Karadžić established order in that historical chain of facts which shape the continuity of the oral tradition. From that perspective, the

process of compressing different layers of history, civilization and reality, emerges as the law of the creation and oral existence of lyric folk songs. Much changes in these songs, as it does in life, but there always remains a fertile nucleus able to generate anew, attracting fresh elements like a magnet. Much ritual has disappeared for good; some has lost its meaning and the authority rendered by belief; but songs which accompanied ritual have remained, and are sung today, often resembling riddles or blurred images of the past.

In the past ritual was a syncretic form regulating personal and social life, and was based on firm rules and strict order. Consequently, ritual was for centuries a reliable safeguard of magic formulas and of songs which could not be separated from their musical element. Everything had to be reproduced precisely. Repetition grew into the major feature of the style and poetics of lyric songs. Only by taking all those elements together is it possible to explain the surprising resemblance between some of Karadžić's recordings and the considerably older lyric tradition, either published or in manuscript. Let one example illustrate this: when Karadžić was in Dubrovnik, Montenegro and the Bay of Kotor (1834-35), he listened to a singer in Perast who sang lyric songs — particularly toasts (*počasnice*). The singer did not know that some of his songs had been recorded by Nikola Burović, a captain from Perast, as early as 1696. Nor could he know that some of those songs corresponded strikingly to the songs he was performing for Karadžić almost a century and a half later in that same location. To Karadžić we owe the first recognition of the existence of that same patriarchal culture, uncontaminated by any environmental or language changes.

Both collectively and individually, oral lyric poetry has acquired the status of timeless poetry, impersonal and supra-personal. The past of a lyric song always contains something that belongs to the present, just as its present existence always carries some of its past performances. The world of human emotions, the major and universal content around and within which lyric songs are shaped, remains permanent. What changes are only the forms and combinations in which that content is reflected and poetically presented. It seems that these words bring us close to the interpretation of tradition as formulated by T.S. Eliot in his essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent'.² However, such an attractive yet dangerous temptation is far too challenging for this chapter.

² *Egoist*, VI, No. 4, September/October, 1919, pp. 54-55.

Chapter Six

The classification of Serbo-Croat oral epic song into cycles: reasons and consequences

MARIJA KLEUT

There is no need to emphasize the wealth of oral epic songs recorded in the regions where Serbo-Croat is spoken. It is the reason why the Serbo-Croat oral epic tradition has aroused such great interest among scholars ever since the work of Vuk Karadžić. Alois Schmaus once qualified the number of songs and their variants by the phrase 'bewildering multitude'. This makes the precise classification of Serbo-Croat oral songs a matter of exceptional importance. It is possible to gain an insight into the songs of a less developed oral tradition without such a classification. In the study of Serbo-Croat oral poetry, however, the system of classification of the songs has serious implications for the manner in which we approach the variety of types and conduct our research. The choice of classification criteria determines attitudes towards the phenomenon.

Yugoslav scholars have usually classified the songs into cycles. They are published in cycles in most collections, anthologies and other editions; the plot features of a song are considered according to cycles; a cycle is studied as a group of songs with certain common features. Without too much exaggeration it could be said that the idea of cycles has become a mode of thinking about Serbo-Croat epic poetry in general, and, in particular, influences every attempt at ordering the songs. By contrast there have been few attempts to examine this classification system from a theoretical standpoint. The term cycle is, therefore, used in several senses, sometimes even arbitrarily, while the classification schemes are inconsistent. This chapter will attempt to discover the reasons for the widespread tendency to classify the songs into cycles and to indicate some of the possible consequences. To start with, however, it is necessary to present the classification into cycles in general outline.

For a detailed consideration of the effect of the classification of epic songs into cycles, it would be necessary to consider all the most important collections and all the most important studies of Serbo-Croat oral songs. Since this is not possible here, I shall concentrate on the four

authors whose works have been the most influential.¹ Their classification schemes are set out in the following table.

CLASSIFICATION SCHEMES OF SERBO-CROAT ORAL EPIC SONGS

P. Popović	V. M. Jovanović	V. Djurić	T. Čubelić
1. unhistorical cycle	1. unhistorical songs	1. unhistorical songs	1. mythological epic cycle
2. Nemanjić cycle	2. historical songs	2. pre-Kosovo songs	2. medieval Serbian nobility cycle
3. Kosovo cycle	1. Nemanjić and Mrnjavčević songs	3. Kosovo songs	3. Kosovo and the Kosovo heroes cycle
4. Branković cycle	2. Kosovo songs	4. Marko Kraljević songs	4. Marko Kraljević cycle
5. Crnojević cycle	3. Marko Kraljević songs	5. Branković, Jakšić, Crnojević and the Croatian bans songs	5. despots, bans and vojvoda cycle
6. <i>hajduk</i> cycle	4. Branković, Jakšić songs	6. <i>hajduk</i> songs	6. <i>hajduk</i> cycle
7. <i>uskok</i> cycle	5. Crnojević cycle	7. <i>uskok</i> songs	7. <i>uskok</i> cycle
8. liberation of Montenegro cycle	6. <i>hajduk</i> songs	8. liberation of Montenegro and Serbia	8. Muslim epic song cycle
9. liberation of Serbia	7. <i>uskok</i> songs		9. Montenegrin and Hercegovinian struggles for liberation
	8. Montenegrin struggles		10. the liberation of Serbia cycle
	9. liberation of Serbia		
	10. most recent times		

There are differences in classification, in definition and in naming cycles. These differences stem, in part, from differences in distinguishing the material (Serbian epic poetry, epic poetry of the Serbo-Croat speaking region) and also, in part, from conceptual differences in the criteria applied. In all the cases considered (and in many not mentioned), the same classification system is used. The main criterion of classification is an actual historical event, defined in different ways, or,

¹ Pavle Popović, *Pregled srpske književnosti*, Belgrade, 1909; V.M. Jovanović, *Srpske narodne pesme — Antologija*, Belgrade, 1922; V. Djurić, *Antologija narodnih junačkih pesama*, Belgrade, 1954; T. Čubelić, *Epske narodne pjesme*, Zagreb, 1970.

to be more precise, there are different limits to the segments of time which it is supposed the poems treat:

- a) an historical period is determined according to the life and times of a certain family (Nemanjić, Branković, etc.);
- b) an historical event is taken as the criterion for the classification of a song as part of a certain cycle (the Battle of Kosovo);
- c) an historically documented form of resistance to Turkish rule is taken as the criterion for determining a period and cycle (the *hajduk*, *uskok*);
- d) a form of rule is taken as a criterion for determining a cycle (despots, bans);
- e) the national associations of a song and its heroes form a basis for grouping (Muslim songs);
- f) the absence of an historical marker, the impossibility of determining actual and poetic time also functions as a criterion for marking the limits of a cycle (unhistorical songs).

A more consistent application of one of the cited criteria would lead to a different classification scheme. For instance, by analogy with the Marko Kraljević cycle, we should speak of cycles concerned with Starina Novak, Ivan Senjanin, Stojan Janković and many other heroes who appear with any regularity in the oral epic tradition. By analogy with the Kosovo cycle, a cycle could be devoted to the First Serbian Uprising. By analogy with the *hajduk* or *uskok* cycles, a cycle could be devoted to the stealing and re-stealing of sheep, and so on. It should also be noted that many inconsistencies remain in the determination of what is historical and in the determination of the concept of the cycle, and that these inconsistencies still await systematic scrutiny and clarification.

Despite the difference in classification schemes and the different meanings attributed to the term cycle, the classification of songs into cycles is based on the assumption that it is both possible and useful to establish a chronological order of the songs which corresponds to historical time. Implicit in this classification is the further assumption that oral epic songs represent a kind of history in verse. This concept predates the classification of Serbo-Croat oral songs into cycles, and thus the use of the term 'cycle'; moreover the concept is also evident in the work of those authors who do not use the term. The way in which Karadžić grouped the songs in his collection — his manner of 'putting the songs into order' (*metanja pjesama u red*) as he termed it — provided a basis for classifying songs into cycles, while the crucial influence of his collection on later views of oral literature may explain the widespread adoption of the classification of songs into cycles.

For Karadžić, classification was primarily a pragmatic problem: how to bring the large number of songs he had collected into some order convenient for publication. The principles he applied to solve the problem were not accompanied by any explanation. As is well known,

in his four books, he used a global classification common to both the Leipzig (1824) and Vienna (1841) editions. He divided epic songs into three groups, defined in the titles of the books as: a) *pjesme junačke najstarije* (heroic songs of the oldest times), b) *pjesme junačke srednjijeh vremena* (heroic songs of intermediate times), and c) *pjesme junačke novijih vremena o vojevanju za slobodu* (heroic songs of recent times about the struggle for freedom). In each book he made an attempt to arrange the songs in a chronological order starting from the oldest heroes mentioned in the book and ending with those closest to his own time.

In his first publication of epic songs in his *Narodna srpska pjesnarica* (1815), Karadžić implemented this principle without particularly stressing it. In the introduction he pointed out that the poems 'which are sung in the well-known Serbian manly voice to the sound of the *gusle* and which seem to contain in themselves some history ... have retained and even now contain for the common folk the former Serbian being and name.'² This is a repetition, in a slightly different form, of Herder's concept of the poetry of 'unpolished nations' and a continuation and acceptance of the way Andrija Kačić-Miošić had ordered the songs in his *Razgovor ugodni naroda slovinskoga* (Pleasant conversation of the Slav People). Although at the very beginning of his work Karadžić clearly set the songs of Kačić's collection apart from the folk ones, and though later (in the introduction to the Fourth Book, 1833) he stressed that 'historical truth' should not be sought in 'folk songs' (or in any other kind of songs), he did not abandon the idea of arranging the songs in chronological order and giving them, thereby, the appearance of history in verse.³ That he followed Kačić in this can be deduced from the fact that he sets up a history in verse from the beginning of his work, while his doubts come later; these were evidently shared by Kačić, for the songs about Ivan Senjanin follow those about Stojan Janković.

In the introduction, 'Bratu štioću', to his work, Kačić explains the implicit concept underlying his collection: what in other nations is recorded history has been preserved for the 'Slovin' nation in its songs.⁴ Kačić's vision of history in verse is based on a broad pan-Slav programme, fostered by Enlightenment notions and ideologically linked to the declared mission of western Catholic countries to expel the Turks; the vision is realized by his composition of songs of his own following the pattern of oral songs, by the careful editing of examples of oral tradition and by publishing folk songs. Kačić and Karadžić believe that folk songs give an image of past reality but they are both critical in their view of the factual veracity of their materials. Kačić: '(the songs)

² Vuk Stefanović Karadžić, *Sabrana dela*, I, Belgrade, 1965, pp. 280-84, 244.

³ Jovan Deretić, 'Vukova poetika narodnog pesništva', in J. Deretić (ed.), *Ogledi iz narodnog pesništva*, Belgrade, 1978, pp. 93-94, 111-14.

⁴ Andrija Kačić Miošić, *Razgovor ugodni naroda slovinskoga*, 2nd edn, Zagreb, 1946, p. 7.

are not completely true, nor does each of them have a solid foundation in truth'; Karadžić: '... one should not seek a truthful history, but the tale, which is the most important thing in heroic songs, in any song by a good singer is not completely contrary to common folk and ordinary poetic sense.' In other respects their views differ. Karadžić, inspired by the ideas of the First Serbian Uprising (1804) and dedicated to establishing Serbian culture, first identifies a continuity by his choice of songs for publication. It has been observed that Karadžić 'has his own specific criterion not only for aesthetic quality but also for the subject-matter of Serbo-Croat folk songs'.⁵ His interest in songs about older events and heroes is well known, and a closer study would show that he chose to print those songs in which anachronisms are less evident.

The idea of folk songs as records of past events was adopted by others, with greater or lesser changes, adapted and altered according to their own principles and their material. Petar II Petrović, Prince-Bishop Njegoš collected songs about the events and personalities of Montenegrin history and published them in chronological order in his *Ogledalo srpsko* (1845). In the introduction he says: 'It is true that in some places the poetry somewhat exaggerates the exploits of the Montenegrins, but in many others, the most important ones, it follows the truth strictly.'⁶ Ivo Franjo Jukić and Grga Martić's collection *Narodne pjesme bosanske i hercegovačke* begins with songs about Marko Kraljević, followed by songs about the 'hajduk' and 'uskok', and ends with songs about Mijat Tomić. In the introduction, addressing the 'Slovin' people Martić says '... for you yourself have dutifully preserved and respected this treasure of yours, have abundantly enjoyed it and have seen mirrored in it the valiant deeds of your ancients, have become conversant with them ...'⁷

The view that the songs reflect past reality and the idea of historical fact embedded in epic verse, merely touched upon here, has to be understood in the context of the cultural-political circumstances of the beginning of the nineteenth century: the need to acquire autonomy, the editor's desire to further the development of national self-awareness by seeking roots in the past, and by the determination to educate the ordinary people. The main exponents of this view of oral literature were at the same time the ideological leaders of the emerging nation. The critical stance they took towards the historical veracity of folk songs did not prevent them from considering these songs a vehicle for national, political and cultural revival.

Karadžić did not, of course, assign the songs to cycles, but such a classification was implicit in his manner of 'putting the songs into

⁵ Radmila Pešić, 'Stariji sloj pesama o uskocima' (*Anali Filološkog fakulteta*, VII, Belgrade, 1967, p. 49).

⁶ Petar Petrović Njegoš, *Ogledalo srpsko*, Belgrade, 1951, p. 10.

⁷ Ivo Franjo Jukić, Grga Martić, *Narodne pjesme bosanske i hercegovačke*, Osijek, 1858, pp. iii, vi.

order'. The approach was maintained by the authority of his collections and by the fact that almost all subsequent collections were modelled on his. The chronological principle in the arrangement of the songs and, arising from this, the division of songs into cycles are an expression of a romantic concept of oral literature. The emphasis or over-emphasis on the similarity between an actual event and the poetic version, the playing down or disregarding of differences between the epic songs and historically verified reality was the price some scholars paid for a national-romantic view of the past and of oral literature. Their historicism rests on a romantic and pre-romantic view of oral literature. In subsequent scholarship it is amplified by other approaches, particularly by philological and positivist ones.

The division of the songs into cycles is not without its merits: it offers a clear review of the personalities and events which are the subject of oral songs, it facilitates interpretation of the content structure of the works, and it illuminates certain plot elements. An entire branch of studies of oral epics is based on such a classification, with its main focus on establishing the historical foundations of the songs and determining the relationship between poetic fiction and objective reality. Its applicability in studies of a different kind, however, is open to doubt.

Numerous problems arise in assigning oral epic songs to cycles. Some stem from the inconsistent definition of the notion of a cycle and from discrepancies in the determination of criteria. In addition, such a classification excludes personalities and events after the second half of the nineteenth century, although the oral tradition carried on, as did songs about personalities and events of local importance. There is the special problem of songs about personalities whose identity in history cannot be determined accurately from the name of the character, and of songs whose poetic heroes are given the names of persons who lived in different times (e.g. Marko Kraljević, Janko Sibirjanin, Ivan Senjanin and Stojan Janković are contemporaries in the songs). Songs of this kind can be arbitrarily assigned to a certain cycle or included in several different ones. Variants in which an event is represented in the same or similar manner, but in which the names of the heroes vary, are in the same position.

An inherent contradiction in the division of the songs into cycles arises from the fact that it is based on a synchronic study of oral poetry, with all the creations of oral epic poetry considered as fixed. The essential feature of such a classification — the capacity of the poem to depict a past event — is considered to be given once and for all. The division of songs into cycles is burdened by historicism, while its view of the phenomenon of oral poetry is ahistorical. In this way it manifests a contradictory attitude towards a work of oral literature taken as a whole.

A careful examination of oral epic songs reveals, on the one hand, that a certain poetic character may be considered an historical

personality in so far as he has the same name and certain other plot detail (e.g., toponym, kinship relation); considered on the diachronic level of oral epic poetry, however, the character undergoes continual change. On the other hand, songs which were created at different times and which survived for different periods of time in traditional oral transmission do not show the same relationship between historical and poetic time. The picture of a past event in Filip Višnjić's rendering of 'The Beginning of the Revolt against the Dahijas' is not the same as in the song 'The Death of Duke Prijezda' by the blind singer Jeca.

Even though the significance of these inherent weaknesses in the division of songs into cycles can be reduced through scrupulous and critical application of the method, one fundamental challenge to its adequacy remains: is the choice of criteria the right one for reaching a proper understanding of the phenomenon of Serbo-Croat oral epic poetry? In short, is it possible at all to apply historiographic criteria to the classification of oral epic poetry? Recent studies have revealed that anachronism and anatopism are not only 'possible mistakes in dating and locating which we would ... be ready to forgive' but 'the principles of oral epic creation'.⁸ The recognition of these principles undermines the division into cycles and forces us to seek new and more adequate ways of handling the unique Serbo-Croat materials in respect of theoretical questions relating to their form and function.

⁸ Svetozar Koljević, 'Anahronizam i anatopizam: načela usmenog epskog stvaranja' (*Letopis Matice srpske*, CCXCXXI/4, 1978, pp. 464-83).

Chapter Seven

Poems and events: historicity in Serbo-Croat oral epics

JOVAN DERETIĆ

What relationship does an epic bear towards history? This question, old to poetics,¹ is of paramount importance for understanding Serbo-Croat epic. We encounter it at the very outset. As the previous chapter shows, it is enough simply to take any of the collections or anthologies of heroic poetry to see immediately that the poems are classified in accordance with historical principles, according to a real or supposed chronology of events and personages portrayed in them. Vuk Karadžić was the first to adopt this approach, and others followed suit. This principle is based on a view of Serbo-Croat oral epic as a special kind of history expressed in poetic form, 'oral folk history'.²

However, as soon as we turn from the epic as a whole to individual poems, such a view runs into difficulties. Karadžić was the first to assert that 'one should not look for *true history*',³ in either old or new poems. Empirical research soon proved him right. In the light of subsequent

¹ Aristotle was the first to pose this question and offer a general answer to it. See Aristotle, *Poetics*, in Aristotle, Horace, Longinus, *Classical Literary Criticism*, London, 1972, Ch. 9.

² Stojan Novaković, *Narodne tradicije i kritička istorija* (1879). See S. Novaković, *Istorija i tradicija*, Belgrade, 1982, p. 14. This understanding is founded in oral poetics, in the popular understanding that a poem does not invent but that it merely embellishes poetically events which did in fact take place. Such a view also underlies early views about oral heroic epic. Andrija Kačić-Miošić, a Dalmatian poet of the mid-eighteenth century, who started the great movement towards oral epic in the South Slav lands, maintained for example that poems were true witnesses of the past, a replacement of the written history that was so scarce among the South Slavs (see *Djela Andrije Kačića Miošića*, Zagreb, 1942, p. 5 [*Stari pisci hrvatski*, 27]).

³ Vuk Stefanović Karadžić, Introduction to Book IV of *Srpske narodne pjesme* of the Leipzig edition: p. xxxvi. See Karadžić, *O srpskoj narodnoj poeziji*, Borivoje Marinković (ed.), Belgrade, 1964, p. 151. Karadžić has also stressed elsewhere the autonomy of the oral poems in relation to history. In a letter to Prince Miloš, written in 1823, explaining why in the poem 'The Battle for Čačak', his (Miloš's) role is not stressed, he says: '... I beg you to think only that the *poem is not history*. In history, *truth* is valued and respected, while in a *poem* one values how it was *invented and arranged*' (Karadžić, *O srpskoj narodnoj poeziji*, p. 279).

discoveries of historical records and documents pertaining to the Middle Ages, it became apparent that in reality events had usually taken a quite different course, and in some cases historical fact was the very opposite of what was described in the poems. This realization caused a revolution in Serbian historiography. The writing of history parted ways definitively with oral poetry and commenced an independent, strictly scholarly development, based on critical documentation. The problem of the historicity of the epic poems did not, however, immediately cease to be topical. The absence of a literal, factual resemblance to recorded history does not mean that these poems are entirely devoid of historical content or significance. In order to establish methodological criteria for an interpretation of the relationship between the historical and the non-historical in epic poems, we must start from the assumption that a poem is, by its very nature, primarily fictional; secondly, we must put aside the methods of positivist, factual historiography and look for different, more comprehensive models of historicity.

The methodologies and research models developed by the 'French School' of structural historiography offer one approach. The distinction, for example, between micro- and macrohistory, or 'histoire de courte durée' and 'histoire de longue durée', as formulated by F. Braudel, one of the leading protagonists of that school,⁴ could help us in resolving a contradiction manifest in earlier interpretations of the notion of historicity in epic poems. On the level of the oral epics as a whole, or within certain larger entities, such as epic cycles, historicity is almost taken for granted but as soon as we turn to individual poems it ceases to be consistent and becomes open to question. However, only individual poems have a real existence in the Serbo-Croat epics; cycles and similar constructs are in effect the invention of scholars. There cannot, therefore, be any one feature of epic poetry as a genre which is not at the same time also a feature of the individual poems. In other words, anything that is claimed to exist in oral epic as a whole must first be shown to exist in the individual poems. Historicity cannot be held as a basic characteristic of Serbo-Croat oral epic unless it is present in the poems of which this poetry is comprised. There is no question of any disharmony between the poems and the genre, the problem, rather, lies in the varying degrees of historicity within the different layers of a poem. The facts of macrohistory tend to be reflected far more faithfully in a poem than the individual events of microhistory. The historicity of the Serbo-Croat epics does not manifest itself primarily in the record of individual events, but rather as the memory of entire epochs of history, from the Middle Ages up to the liberation wars in the nineteenth century; the epics convey the sense of continuity from one epoch to another and the consciousness of national history as a whole.

⁴ Fernand Braudel, *Ecrits sur l'Histoire*, Paris, 1977, pp. 41-83.

It is only once we have established this primary level of historicity that we can attempt to discern relationships between poems and events. Do the poems memorize events, and to what extent is such a recollection in poems part of the general epic recollection of the past? The greatest challenge in this kind of research is represented by the poems of the oldest cycles. The many changes these poems have passed through in the course of their development have resulted in the steady extension of the legendary, mythical content on the one hand and a constant shrinking of the historical component on the other.

These elements are not identical in all the poems. Historical events portrayed in some of them may be easily identified. These tend to be poems which treat important events or turning points, such as the death of Tsar Dušan and the dissolution of his empire, the relationship between Uroš and the Mrnjavčević family, Prince Lazar as the Nemanjić heir, the Battle of Kosovo ... We could term these historical in the narrower sense. And, as such, they represent the mainstay of the traditional view of epic poetry as oral folk history. On the other hand, however, it was precisely over those poems that critical historiography parted ways with oral poetry, since the documents showed the poems to be incorrect: King Vukašin did not murder Tsar Uroš, Prince Lazar was not the father-in-law of Jug-Bogdan, Vuk Branković did not betray anyone at Kosovo. The details of the events were not transmitted faithfully, though their historical sense was authentic.

The example of Prince Lazar illuminates this process with particular clarity. The old chronicles and genealogies portray Lazar as a legitimate, if not the direct, heir to the Nemanjić throne, the legitimacy having been secured through his marriage to Milica, a princess of the Nemanjić lineage.⁵ The folk poems, however, portray Milica as not of Nemanjić, but rather, of Jugović descent.⁶ That represents the principal divergence of the poem from history. It has remained true to the facts, however, in some other, more important aspects. There appears to be much in common between Lazar's real in-laws and his imaginary ones as portrayed in the poems. Milica's father, Jug-Bogdan, is presented as 'mighty', 'rich' and 'haughty', assuming all the attributes which a true Nemanjić would boast, while her brothers, the Jugovići, are presented as the greatest lords in the land, of whom even Tsar Stefan is in awe, and in comparison to whom Lazar appears to be no more than an

⁵ See Frank Kämpfer, 'Prilog interpretaciji Pećkog rodoslova', *Prilozi za književnost, jezik, istoriju i folklor*, XXXVI, Belgrade, 1970, pp. 67-79.

⁶ It is as if a noble family of Juga, which we encounter in written documents of the end of the fourteenth century and the beginning of the fifteenth century, bears a certain connection to this. A member of the family had the same name as the oldest Jugović, Vojin. See Konstantin Jiriček, *Istorija Srba*, trans. and ed. Jovan Radonić, II, Belgrade, 1952, pp. 384-85.

unimportant late-comer.⁷ The fact that Milica had been the link between the older and younger dynasty was forgotten in the epics, but nevertheless she behaves and speaks as though that role had been a matter of course.⁸ And, most importantly, Lazar's role of legitimate heir to the Nemanjić dynasty is understood in the poems in the same way as in the old chronicles, even though the poems ignore his connection with the old dynasty through marriage, while the chronicles base their interpretation precisely on that connection.

The treatment of facts is similar in other cases: King Vukašin is not, as the poem would have it, the murderer of Tsar Uroš, but he was a usurper, accused in the records of his time of having seized a large part of the empire.⁹ The treason of Branković also belongs to the realm of epic legends, although very early historical sources do tell us of discord and treachery at Kosovo.¹⁰ The narrative thread tends to be different or even diametrically opposite in the poems and recorded history, but the portrayal of the background, and particularly the interpretation of the meaning of events, contain important differences as well as an essential resemblance.

The number of poems about the decisive events of history is not particularly large. The imagination of singers tends rather to be stirred by marginal, episodic or quite peripheral events, or even the heroes' personal affairs. Historical identification is far more difficult in such cases, since contemporary chroniclers paid little attention to such events, or overlooked them altogether; if we do know something about such events it is entirely fortuitous. The theme of the poem 'The Death of Duke Prijezda'¹¹ is, like that of the *Iliad*, the defence of a besieged city. The Turkish Sultan had been besieging the fortified city of Stalać for three years in order to seize the three treasures of Duke Prijezda: his sword, his horse and his wife called, like the heroine of the *Iliad*, Helen

⁷ The relationship between the Jugovići-Tsar Stefan Dušan-Prince Lazar was presented in the poem 'Prince Lazar's Wedding', Vuk Stef. Karadžić, *Srpske narodne pjesme* (hereafter Karadžić), II, p. 32.

⁸ In the poem 'The Construction of Ravanica' (Karadžić, II, p. 35), Milica reminds her husband of his state duties by recalling the example of the rulers of the old dynasty:

Što bijahu Nemanjići stari,
carevaše, pa i preminuše.
Ti ostada u stolu njinome.

Oh, what the Nemanjićs of old were,
They reigned, and they perished.
Thou hast remained on that throne of theirs.

⁹ Arhiepiskop Danilo, in Djura Daničić (ed.), *Životi kraljeva i arhiepiskopa srpskih*, Zagreb, 1866, p. 381.

¹⁰ Concerning the historical background of the legend of the treason of Vuk Branković, see Rade Mihaljčić, *Lazar Hrebeljanović. Istorija. Kult. Predanje*, Belgrade, 1984, pp. 291-324.

¹¹ Karadžić, II, p. 84.

(Jelena). The poem is not without historical foundation. Constantine the Philosopher speaks of the siege of Stalać and of the heroism of its defenders.¹² In some of the poems we encounter a situation reminiscent of the return song in the *Odyssey*: the hero, after a long absence, comes home just in time to prevent his wife's re-marriage (e.g. 'The Imprisonment of Stojan Janković').¹³ This similarity ought not to have surprised anyone, since we have here a universal epic motif. There was certainly some surprise, however, when archival research showed that this motif was not ascribed to the seventeenth-century hero by chance: Stojan Janković had indeed been captured by the Turks and taken to Constantinople, where he was released after payment of a ransom fourteen months later.¹⁴

In their treatment of events these two poems are far more typical of the heroic epic than other poems mentioned earlier. They show that an event need not be of paramount importance in order to become the subject of a poem; it is enough on the one hand that the event be out of the ordinary, attractive, characteristic, and, on the other, that it be easily incorporated into the existing models of epic poetry.

In most cases, historical identification of events described in the poems may not be possible in the absence of records, or the poems themselves may have changed so much with the passage of time that the original subject-matter has become obscure. Most of the poems belonging to the extensive Prince Marko cycle are of that kind, and so are poems about many other heroes. However, all connection with history is not lost even in such poems. In most cases their heroes are people who existed in reality, and it is therefore valid to ask what has been preserved by the poems apart from their name. From this perspective, the cases of two epic heroes, Marko Kraljević and Miloš Vojinović, are of particular interest.

Marko Kraljević represents the greatest riddle of all South Slav epic poetry. All the available data on him suggest that he was an historically unimportant personage. How then, has this pale personality of Prince Marko grown into the giant epic figure of Marko Kraljević? Whether Marko was a hero and protector of the people in the face of Turkish atrocities, we do not know, but it seems an acceptable supposition. Field-work research into more recent epics has shown that the heroes of epic are also the heroes of the oral folk chronicles, close to the events they portray, before they step over into legend, the first stage in the

¹² 'Stalać had been reduced to ashes in a similar way. While in the tower the noble master remained fighting for the defence of the city until it burnt down, like the heroes of old.' Vatroslav Jagić, 'Konstantin Filozof i njegov "Život Stefana Lazarevića despota srpskog"' (*Glasnik Srpskog učenog društva*, 42, 1875, p. 270).

¹³ Karadžić, III, p. 25.

¹⁴ Boško Desnica, 'Ropstvo Janković Stojana' (*Prilozi za književnost, jezik, istoriju i folklor*, II, 1922, pp. 196-200).

process of an artistic shaping of the oral epic. What was it in the historical character of Prince Marko that attracted the singers of his day, and what was it that made him survive the short-lived phase of the chronicle song and enter the epic legend, as its central figure? Among the sparse records on this personage, two facts seem significant, since they help to bring Marko the man closer to us. The first concerns a scandalous love affair involving Marko,¹⁵ and the other, his relationship with the Turks. According to Constantine the Philosopher, on the eve of the Battle of Rovine, where he was to meet his death fighting on the Turkish side, Marko told Konstantin Dejanović: 'I say and I pray to the Lord to come to the aid of the Christians, and let me be the first of the dead in this war.'¹⁶ This can be linked with certain aspects of the Marko epics, though not for the purpose of explaining the creation of those epics, as some scholars have done.¹⁷ It is methodologically more acceptable to move from the well-known towards that which can only be vaguely discerned. Not from history towards the poems in other words, but rather the other way round, from the poems towards history. What do the data on the historical figure of Marko tell us when examined in the light of the Marko epics? In Marko's words cited above we can already sense the contradictory quality inherent in the songs. There is the contradiction in Marko's political position: he serves the enemy while tirelessly striving to help his own people. Provided this statement is authentic, provided it had not itself become part of a tradition about the hero, it shows that the historical Marko was aware of this contradiction. And, if we connect the two above-mentioned sources, if we understand them as data on this personality, we can discover another major contradiction in the songs, the contradiction in the moral behaviour of the hero, covering a broad range from the scandalous to the sublime. Therefore, even though the data cannot tell us anything conclusive about the formation of epic songs about Marko, the contours of the man we know so well from the poems can dimly be discerned in the historical data.

We arrive at a similar conclusion in the case of Miloš Vojinović if we compare the meagre data on his historical prototype with the poems about him. As a historical personage, Miloš is even less important than Marko. Historians of the time do not mention him and it is only a partial

¹⁵ Marko's subject, Dobre, left an inscription on a book that he had been writing: 'v dni blagovernago kralja Marka, jegda otdade Teodoru, Grgurovu ženu, Hlapenu, a uze ženu svoju prvovenčanu Jelenu' (*Stari srpski zapisi i natpisi*, coll. and ed. Ljub. Stojanović, Srpska kraljevska akademija, No. 189, Belgrade, 1902, pp. 58-59 ('in the times of the pious King Marko, who gave Grgur's wife Teodora to Hlapen, and took to himself his previous wife, Jelena').

¹⁶ Jagić, op. cit., p. 307.

¹⁷ Nikola Banašević, *Ciklus Marka Kraljevića i odjeci francusko-talijanske viteške književnosti*, Skopje, 1935, p. 34.

reference in archival sources that allows us to assume that he did exist.¹⁸ Miloš's case is thus interesting in a methodological sense as well. In poems about Miloš, and partly also in the poems about Marko, the problem of historicity is viewed from the standpoint of different interpretations, one given by the historians of the time, and the other contained in his poems. Having said that, the possibility of mutual influence can never be excluded. Here we are nevertheless in a position to compare the epic hero with the actual personage described in the written documents.

Miloš is the hero of two epic poems: 'Dušan's Wedding',⁹ and 'Miloš Vojinović and the Lord of Kotor'.²⁰ Although the two poems are different, they share a common feature: in both of them, Miloš finds himself in conflict with the 'Latins' (Catholic westerners). The 'Latin' theme has an important place in Serbo-Croat oral epic, Latins being the main foreign epic adversary after Turks and Arabs. The major epic heroes come into conflict with opponents of many nationalities, but Miloš Vojinović stands out among them as engaging only Latins in combat.

Historical support for such a role is not hard to find. The house of Vojinović were the lords of Hun, neighbours of Dubrovnik, and, in general of the coastal, Catholic and Latin world with which they were in constant contact. Evidence is found in many documents dating back to the time of the ascent of the house of Vojinović. The only real data we have concerning Miloš deal with the relationship between Serbia and Dubrovnik. Miloš took part in the negotiations which King Dušan carried on with the representatives of Dubrovnik concerning the 'ceding' of the city of Ston and the Pelješac Peninsula to Dubrovnik.²¹

A typical feudal history precedes that event, a history full of dramatic turns of fortune and bloody settlements. A mighty noble family Branivojević perished in the course of it, and this family was related to the house of Vojinović. The sister of Miloš Vojinović was married to one of the Branivojević brothers.²² Those events must have

¹⁸ At the beginning of King Dušan's reign, Miloš was a *stavilac* at his court. This court position of the lowest rank was usually the starting point of the career of a nobleman's son. Miloš died young and did not distinguish himself in any particular way. His brothers, the Great Lord Altoman and Prince Vojislav are much better known. The latter had been the most important of the regional lords in the first period of Tsar Uroš's reign. The oral poem knows of three Vojinović brothers, but remembers only Miloš by name. The poem had also altered his family status: from the oldest son of Prince Vojin, which he had really been, he had been made the youngest, since it is to the youngest, according to folk beliefs, that all advantages, both bodily and spiritual, belong.

²⁰ The poem was published by Sima Milutinović under the title *Oklada (Pjevanija crnogorska i hercegovačka)*, Leipzig, 1837, No. 123.

²¹ Rade Mihaljčić, *Kraj srpskoga carstva*, Belgrade, 1975, p. 34.

²² The tragedy of the house of Branivojević began in the turbulent times after the death of King Milutin (1321). Exploiting the weakness of the central administration in the

had a great impact on the Serbian state and the possibility that they inspired songs should not be excluded. Miloš Vojinović might have also been in those songs, portrayed as one of the heroes. Could that have been his epic début? Obviously, that cannot be proved. But the logic of the origin of epic poems makes this possible, even quite probable.

However, irrespective of whether such a poem existed or not, or whether it had any connection with the later glory of Miloš Vojinović, one thing is obvious: a common trait links the course of events in which Miloš finds himself in an identical situation: as Tsar Dušan's man he enters into contact with the Latins. In other words, a paradigmatic relationship was established between the real events and the events described in the poems, characterized by four common elements: the hero, the ruler, the adversary and, in a fundamental sense, the basic relationship. There is a contest of strength, wits and ability among the same adversaries, a competitive, combative relationship in which the fundamental values of each party are at stake. There is, however, also an important difference which is equally indicative of the key issue. It concerns the resolution of the conflict. In reality, the Serbian side came off worse, but in the poems the Serbian hero always overpowers his opponents and proves his and his ruler's superiority. This is where the compensatory role of the poem comes to the fore.

Separated by a distance of virtually five centuries, oral epic knows nothing of the relationship between Serbia and the Republic of Dubrovnik, or the events in which Miloš Vojinović participated; but it has recorded the fact that this hero came into conflict with the Latins. The relationship with the Latins was portrayed in the same way as in other poems, in the spirit of the traditional view of the Latins as 'old cheats'. That relationship represents the chief link between real events

Western Provinces, the Branivojević brothers started behaving as independent lords of their domains. That estrangement from the ruler of Serbia ended unfortunately for them: their domains were attacked and divided by and between Bosnia and Dubrovnik, when Dubrovnik took possession of Ston and Pelješac (1326), while the house of Branivojević had been destroyed in the course of this war. Two of the brothers had been killed fighting against the Bosnians. The third brother, Branoje, sought protection at the court of Stefan Dečanski, but without success. The king had him thrown into the Kotor jail as a rebel and ordered his execution. The fate of the fourth brother, Brajko, was the most hideous. The Dubrovnik authorities had him and his wife, the sister of Miloš Vojinović, abducted and thrown into jail. Following interventions by the young Tsar Dušan and the Princes Vojin and Mladen, the wife was released, but Brajko was kept in prison where he starved to death (Veljan Trpković, 'Branivojevići', *Istorijski glasnik*, Nos. 3-4, Belgrade, 1960, pp. 55-85). After all that, the status of Ston and Pelješac remained unregulated. Their lands were held by the Dubrovnik Republic, though legally they belonged to the ruler of Serbia. Negotiations in 1333 brought about an agreement: Tsar Dušan 'ceded' this domain to Dubrovnik in return for a fixed annual payment, known as The Income of Ston (*stonski dohodak*) (Veljan Trpković, 'Oko "ustupanja" Stona i Pelješca Dubrovčanima [1326-1333]', *Istorijski glasnik*, Belgrade, 1963, no. 1, pp. 39-60).

and epic happenings, between what Miloš Vojinović did in reality and the heroic deeds ascribed to him in the poem. In those deeds there is nothing of the individual, as the same or similar deeds have been accomplished by other epic heroes, Serbian and foreign alike. The narrative coherence of these poems was not the result of a poetic transposition of real events, as in the poems of the first group. This type of plot must have been arrived at by means of story replacement. The original story, which bore a more direct correspondence to the real events must have been replaced by another one, entirely fictional, made up of typified elements from the general stock of epics. Such replacements are usually effected on the basis of the principle of proximity: like is replaced by like, a certain *tertium comparationis* always existing between the replaced entities, which makes the replacement possible. That helps explain the structural homology between real events in which a character participated and the poem or poems about him which come into being at a much later date. The original story had reflected the main features of the events which inspired the creation of the song, and those features were then subsequently attached to a new narrative, which came to replace the original one. Such replacements, between entities close in kind, one belonging to the real, and the other to the fictional world, realized by means of epic stereotypes, are never complete. Even when replacements are extensive and recurrent, they do not erase everything and we may always discern traces of something that was there before. Thus in the poems about Miloš Vojinović we have identified the four elements mentioned above by means of which the structural correspondence with the relevant historical events was effected.

There are also other ways in which the historical can appear in a poem, in the form of accidental traits, stray particles which always carry an element of the real and concrete with them. Is there, in the poems mentioned, anything of that concrete kind which would lead us directly back to the events portrayed poetically?

The two poems about Miloš Vojinović are typologically very different. 'Dušan's Wedding' is overwhelmingly legendary. The Tsar Stefan has, save for his name, no historical base. The name of his bride, Roksanda, reminds us of legends about Alexander the Great. The City of Ledjen, where he obtains his bride, belongs entirely to the world of fiction. The characteristics of the Vojinović brothers — *ljute kavgadžije* (hot-headed trouble-makers), performers of *zulum* (violent mischief), and tormentors of the Latins — correspond to historical reality. The basic theme of the poem, marriage in the face of obstacles, may be found in the poetry of many peoples throughout the world. This is where the Serbo-Croat poem reminds us of an episode in the

Niebelungenlied.²³ Several variants of the poem in which the heroes are portrayed poetically as various historical and non-historical personages, have been preserved in the South Slav tradition. Karadžić recorded another poem with the same theme, 'Djurdje of Smederovo's Wedding',²⁴ from the same singer, Tešan Podrugović, from whom he had recorded 'Dušan's Wedding'. This poem is set in Dubrovnik with Marko Kraljević as the main hero. In some other poems the role of the enemy city is attributed to another 'Latin' republic, Venice.²⁵ We should not, however, conjecture that the historical 'Latin' cities of Dubrovnik and Venice precede the legendary Latin city of Ledjen of the poem. Perhaps it was just the opposite: the historical cities have, in some instances, taken the place of the non-historical Ledjen, assuming some of its legendary properties and losing some of their real, historical ones. Even Ledjen itself, whose name is derived from the Hungarian word *lengyel* (Pole),²⁶ seems in the imagination of the poet to lie somewhere towards the Adriatic coast.

The other poem about Miloš Vojinović, 'Miloš Vojinović and the Lord of Kotor', is more historical in content. The picture of the town of Kotor is recognizable, the commercial connections between Serbia of the Nemanjić times and Venice are hinted at. In the poem Miloš Vojinović appears in the somewhat unusual role of a merchant who, on the Tsar's orders, buys 'crosses and icons' for Serbian monasteries. The number of variants of this poem is limited. In the main one 'Miloš among the Latins',²⁷ Miloš Obilić replaces Miloš Vojinović, while Prince Lazar replaces Tsar Stefan. The reason for travel to an unidentified Latin city is different from the previous one: Miloš goes to the Latin lands to gather taxes (*kupi harače*) on behalf of his lord. This could refer to Dubrovnik, which paid several tributes to Serbian rulers or dignitaries in return for various concessions.²⁸

Another incident mentioned in the poems requires examination. For a wager Miloš succeeds in throwing a mace over the Dimitra church. As St Demetrius is primarily a saint of the Eastern Church, the church dedicated to him could be expected to be located in an Orthodox, rather than a Catholic city. Thessaloniki was the sole place among cities in neighbouring lands which had a church (a grand one at that) dedicated

²³ M. Halanskiy, *Yuzhnoslavyanskiye skazaniya o Korolyeviche Marke*, cited in Dagmar Burkhart, 'Untersuchungen zur Stratigraphie und Chronologie der südslavischen Volkepik' (*Slavistische Beiträge*, V, 33, 1968, p. 306).

²⁴ Karadžić, II, p. 79.

²⁵ Karadžić, II, pp. 87, 92.

²⁶ Stojan Novaković, 'Ledjen grad i Poljaci u srpskoj narodnoj poeziji' (*Letopis Matice srpske*, 120, 1879, pp. 159-74).

²⁷ Karadžić, II, p. 37.

²⁸ Mihailo Dinić, 'Dubrovački tribut — Mogoriš, Svetodimitrovski i Konavaoski dohodak, Provižun braće Vlatkovića' (*Glas Srpske Kraljevske Akademije*, II gradje, 86, 1935, pp. 137-68).

to St Demetrius. Thus it is possible that in an earlier variant or perhaps in a similar poem, the action might have indeed taken place in Thessaloniki or in its church. The magnificence of Serbian monasteries in the Middle Ages could have been compared only to the Greek monasteries and churches. And Thessaloniki, the second greatest and the most dazzling of Byzantine cities, with which the Serbs had had commercial links throughout the Middle Ages, would have been the first to occur to the singer. In the variant whose hero is Miloš Vojinović the reference to buying crosses and icons points to the East, rather than the West. Serbia engaged in commerce with the Latin world, but sacred objects were predominantly purchased in Byzantium. Miloš Vojinović's ship, or the vessel of an epic predecessor, might have been heading for Constantinople and could have been detained at Thessaloniki. The rivalry between the Serbs and the Greeks, though it never ceased, did diminish during the period of Turkish rule, while the rivalry with the Latins received fresh impetus in the new circumstances and Serbian re-orientation towards the West. The adversaries were now not merely Venice and Dubrovnik, but also Kotor, a city which had been under Serbian rule in Nemanjić times. Transposing the Orthodox St Demetrius to a Latin city might also have come about through association. Among the tributes which the Dubrovnik Republic paid to the rulers of Serbia, the Income of St Demetrius was the most important, named thus since it was paid annually on St Demetrius's Day.

All this goes to show that both variants of the poem 'Miloš among the Latins' contain a number of historical traits. Each of them raises many questions. The reference to taxes (*harač*) points to the kind of relationship between Serbia and Dubrovnik reflected in events in which the real Miloš Vojinović would have participated. The reference could have come from an earlier variant, or from a similar poem portraying such relations in far greater detail. Among those poems there might have been a variant of the hypothetical original poem about Miloš Vojinović, or about some other participants in the Ston events. Historical traits in the poem 'Miloš among the Latins' enable us to recognize the date of the events portrayed, much more so than in the previous poem, and feel close to the events themselves, events which could be supposed to have inspired the poem's original version.

Though it may sometimes seem whimsical and unpredictable, epic memory is not without a certain inner regularity. It is adjusted to the mode of functioning of epic structures. All the examples analysed reveal the same basic tendency, both in the differences in the poems and events and the overlap between them. The greatest changes have occurred in what is singular, individual, external, related to events, belonging to the sphere 'of short duration'. Those changes are determined by the dual nature of the epic poem. As an artistic creation, the poem alters facts; as an oral creation it is itself exposed to constant change. Ignoring the external flow of events, the historical memory turns to what is internal,

general, universal; it betrays the facts but remains faithful to their meaning, preserving what places the event within the broader historical context, and becoming an element of the history of 'long duration'.

Epic generalization in oral poems is carried out in keeping with their artistic character. The poem as poem always places the individual above the general, the concrete above the abstract; an oral poem finds it hard to assimilate the abstract. Epic memory functions only with concrete things, it knows only of events and personages. Abstract ideas may be preserved only if they are amalgamated with specific ones, if they are translated into concrete happenings; a pertinent example is the poem 'The Downfall of the Serbian Empire',²⁹ which is based on the opposition earthly kingdom/kingdom of heaven, characteristic of the medieval worldview. Abstract ideas may also survive if they are formulated in the form of a proverb; *Latini su stare varalice* (Latins are old cheats) is characteristic of the understanding of the relationship with the Latins and is repeated in many poems.

Generalization in epic poetry is achieved by transposing real events into fictional happenings, by transforming history into fable. Fictional happenings are also quite concrete, but the nature of that concreteness is different. Here we return to the old, Aristotelian distinction between poetry and history. Aristotle noted that poetry is 'more philosophical and more worthy of serious attention than history; for while poetry is concerned with universal truths, history treats of particular facts'.³⁰ The poetic particular contains a dimension of generality, universality and the philosophical which is lacking in the historical particular.

We thus arrive at a paradoxical conclusion. The 'fabulization' of history, in the conditions of oral culture, represents the only way of preserving any memory of the past. What once perplexed and upset all patriotic hearts — the unpleasant discovery by scholars that the poems tell lies, that the course of events was quite different from that portrayed in them — turns out in the end to be the necessary precondition of the historicity of the poem. Poems preserve the memory of past events by transforming them into fiction. How far, and to what level this transformation goes will depend, among other things, on the nature of the events described in the poem. Where particularly significant events in the past of a people are concerned, events which have rooted themselves deeply in the collective memory, the poem fictionalizes them, but does not question their identity. This is what has happened in those poems which we categorized as historical in the narrower sense of the word. And, in the case of less important events, as in most epic poems, the poem will, in the end, forget them and instead offer a standard epic plot, which bears some resemblance to the event. In the case of that exchange, some characteristics of the event

²⁹ Karadžić, II, p. 46.

³⁰ Aristotle, op. cit., pp. 43-44.

originally treated and then abandoned will nevertheless remain. Those are, as a rule, themes of broader meaning, such as, for example, the Latin theme, repeated from poem to poem; they enable us to recognize the epoch and sometimes even the narrower historical context of the event.

Both cases show that the term historicity is not a broad concept relevant only to an external view of particular poems. It is inside, within the poem itself, integrated within its verbal tissue in the way which best corresponds to the nature of the epic heroic poem: an art form of the realm of the spoken word. Collected and classified according to their contents, as they were by Vuk Karadžić, these poems do indeed represent an oral history in verse.

Chapter Eight

South Slav oral tradition in a comparative context

JOHN MILES FOLEY

Comparative research on oral traditions owes an enormous debt to the South Slav witness. From Vuk Stefanović Karadžić to Gerhard Gesemann and Matija Murko, and on to Milman Parry and Albert Lord, the narrative poems from various parts of the former Yugoslavia have served as the most widely consulted analogue for ancient Greek and medieval European works with roots in oral tradition, and numerous conclusions about the nature of works we know only in manuscript have depended, implicitly or explicitly, on the *narodne pjesme*.¹

It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that comparisons between the South Slav and other traditions have paid more attention to similarities than to inevitable differences. Naturally enough, the first order of business was to establish a basic congruency among oral narrative traditions, and in that effort too much differentiation would have been counterproductive. Now, however, with the scholarship brimming with explorations of these similarities, the time seems right for a reconsideration of the individuality of oral narrative traditions. Locating and understanding the points of divergence among comparands can only further articulate the comparative method by setting these strong and important correlations against the background of individual features.

What I propose to sketch out, then, is a short programme for differentiating among traditions, genres and even documents;² with this programme in hand, I shall proceed to a brief illustration using one poem collected by Karadžić and one by Parry and Lord. It is hoped that this approach will show how we can work towards a poetics of oral and oral-derived narrative fully as sophisticated as the poetics of written literature.

¹ For a history of the oral theory, see John Miles Foley, *The Theory of Oral Composition: History and Methodology*, Bloomington, IN, 1988; for an annotated bibliography on this approach, id., *Oral-Formulaic Theory and Research*, New York, 1985 [hereafter *OFTR*], with annual updates in the journal *Oral Tradition*.

² For a fuller elaboration of these and related points, see Foley, *Traditional Oral Epic: The Odyssey, Beowulf, and the Serbo-Croatian Return Song*, Berkeley, CA, London, 1990 [hereafter *Studies*].

I

One aspect of comparative research on oral traditions that has received surprisingly little attention is the matter of actual documents in which we encounter the works to be studied.³ The ancient Greek epics with which Parry began his investigations surface whole only in the tenth century, almost two millennia after they are supposed to have taken canonical, pan-Hellenic form, and these late recensions leave behind them an elusive past that simply is not wholly recoverable. How are we to explain the numerous editions at Alexandria (of which we have merely a list)? How do the 'eccentric' papyri come into the picture, especially since they continue to be written with regularity down to the second century? Did the Alexandrians actually produce a Homeric text, and, if so, how did it relate to the hypothesized vulgate?

Whatever answers we proposed for these questions, they will not match the corresponding set of questions raised by the unique manuscript of the *Beowulf* poem. Although over the past thirty-five years scholars have provided copious evidence of the oral-derived nature of *Beowulf*, we know the poem only from Cotton Vitellius v A.xv, part of a codex that contains no similar poetic material. Indeed, the closest analogues to *Beowulf* anywhere in the Anglo-Saxon canon are the verse hagiographies, which share some diction and narrative patterns. We do not know how the work was transmitted before being committed to manuscript, nor do we know anything about the history of the manuscript itself before the seventeenth century. At a conference a few years ago, specialists were unable to date our version of *Beowulf* any more closely than somewhere between the eighth and eleventh century. And we have known since Kenneth Sisam's work (1946) that the authority of Old English poetical manuscripts is hardly absolute.⁴

To these various and uncertain histories of texts and traditions we juxtapose the extant South Slav witness, which includes Karadžić's collection, written down from dictation by him or one of his network of collectors,⁵ and the Parry-Lord narratives, which were sung or recited

³ Compare Albert Bates Lord, 'Homer's Originality: Oral Dictated Texts' (*Transactions of the American Philological Association*, LXXXIV, 1953, pp. 124-34) and 'The Nature of Oral Poetry', in Foley (ed.), *Comparative Research on Oral Tradition: A Memorial for Milman Parry*, Columbus, Ohio, 1987, pp. 313-49; on the text as performance, see Elizabeth C. Fine, *The Folklore Text: from Performance to Print*, Bloomington, IN, 1984.

⁴ See Colin Chase (ed.), *The Dating of Beowulf*, Toronto, London, 1981; Kenneth Sisam, *Studies in the History of Old English Literature*, Oxford, rpt. 1953, pp. 29-44.

⁵ For a summary of this aspect of Karadžić's collecting, see Živomir Mladenović, *Rukopisi narodnih pesama Vukove zbirke i njihovo izdavanje*, Belgrade, 1973, pp. iii-xxiii.

for acoustic recording or taken down from dictation.⁶ At the very least we should be aware of the difference between such *prima facie* oral materials and the ancient and medieval manuscripts that encode poems about whose provenance we cannot be absolutely certain. In analysing the three corpora for formulaic phraseology or thematic patterns, for example, the endemic disparity in the nature of the documents should be taken into account. Texts that have been honed, whether intentionally or not, by generations of rhapsodes, transmitters and editors are simply not equivalent to unedited versions of oral traditional poems taken down from the mouths of singers.

In addition to this matter of *text-dependence* we should also be aware of the crucial importance of *tradition-dependence*, that is, the extent to which the very language and idiom in which an oral work takes shape influences its traditional structure. Parry's doctrine of formulaic structure, dependent on the 'same metrical conditions',⁷ must be applied with precision if meaningful comparative results are to be hoped for. If, for example, one demands that the encapsulated, colonic formula so typical of Homeric and South Slav epic diction serve as the criterion for judging traditional phraseology in Old English — as most Anglo-Saxonists have done, then one will find the diction of *Beowulf* to be relatively unformulaic.⁸ But such an approach completely disregards the idiosyncratic prosody and phraseology of *Beowulf* and its tradition, seeking to substitute a quantitative for a stress-based metre and in the process running roughshod over the natural language characteristics of this Germanic tradition.

We shall have more to say shortly about the South Slav phraseology, but a brief sketch of the central comparative problem here may help. Investigators agree that the Homeric hexameter and South Slav *deseterac* have preserved more features associated with Indo-European metre than has the Anglo-Saxon alliterative line.⁹ This difference can be traced to

⁶ For further information about this process, see Milman Parry, Albert Bates Lord (colls, eds, trans), *Serbo-Croatian Heroic Songs*, I, Cambridge, MA, Belgrade, 1953-54 [hereafter *SCHS*], pp. 3-20; Lord, 'Yugoslav Epic Folk Poetry' (*International Folk Music Journal*, III, 1951, pp. 57-61).

⁷ Parry defined the *formula* as a 'group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea' (*The Making of Homeric Verse*, Adam Parry (ed.), Oxford, 1971 [hereafter *MHV*], p. 272).

⁸ This was the approach taken by Larry D. Benson in his article, 'The Literary Character of Anglo-Saxon Formulaic Poetry' (*Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, LXXXI, pp. 334-41) that attempted to refute the (excessively literal) study by Francis P. Magoun, 'The Oral-Formulaic Character of Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poetry' (*Speculum*, XXVIII, 1953, pp. 446-67).

⁹ Of particular interest are Roman Jakobson, 'Studies in Comparative Slavic Metrics' (*Oxford Slavonic Papers*, III, 1952, pp. 21-66 [hereafter 'Studies']); Martin West, 'Indo-European Metre' (*Glotta*, XLVIII, 1973, pp. 185-94); Gregory Nagy, *Comparative Studies in Greek and Indic Meter*, Cambridge, MA, 1974; Berkley Peabody, *The Winged Word*, Albany, 1975; John Vigorita, 'The Antiquity of

the stress shift in Common Germanic and the resultant evolution of a metre that depends not on syllable- or mora-count, caesura and related parameters but rather on stress, stress patterns and alliteration. Given this reality, the 'same metrical conditions' in Old English diction will vary widely from those observed in ancient Greek and South Slav, and the morphology of the formula will vary correspondingly. To search for recurrent colonic phrases in *Beowulf* is to seek Homeric or Serbo-Croat formulas in an Anglo-Saxon epic.

Along with the variance among documents and traditions we should be aware of divergence, or lack of congruity, among genres. Not a few otherwise promising comparisons have foundered on the issue of *genre-dependence*, which should preclude close analogies between, for example, narrative and non-narrative forms, or between epics and riddles. Just as no responsible literary critic would long suffer a comparative essay on Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Spenser's sonnet cycle, so we must be careful to demand a reasonably close fit between the genres we propose to compare. Parry and Lord meticulously observed this criterion in selecting the long Muslim epic as the natural analogue for the Homeric poems; not only the sheer length of the poems, but also their similar (sometimes identical) story patterns fostered a responsible and productive comparison.¹⁰ But there are also other genres and subgenres in South Slav oral tradition, such as the shorter narratives collected from the Christian tradition by Vuk Karadžić. Many of these songs, especially those from volume two of his original series, are well suited to a comparison with the shorter Old English poems.¹¹

II

To sharpen the perspective from text-, tradition- and genre-dependence slightly, let us consider for a moment the character of the South Slav 'formula' and 'theme' as defined by Parry and Lord.¹² Analysis of the prosodies in symbiosis with Homeric and South Slav epic phraseology makes it clear that there is much similarity between the metres and between the corresponding dictions. But there are also differences. The *deseterac* or decasyllable has often been described as a trochaic pentameter with a caesura between syllables four and five;¹³ the

Serbo-Croatian Verse' (*Južnoslovenski filolog*, XXII, 1976, pp. 205-11); see further Foley, *Studies*.

¹⁰ See *SCHS*, p. 16.

¹¹ A detailed analysis along these lines is available in Foley, 'Literary Art and Oral Tradition in Old English and Serbian Poetry' (*Anglo-Saxon England*, XII, 1983, pp. 183-214 [hereafter 'Literary Art']).

¹² For *formula*, see note 7; Lord defines *themes* as 'the groups of ideas regularly used in telling a tale in the formulaic style of traditional song' (*The Singer of Tales*, Cambridge, MA, 1960, p. 68).

¹³ Especially Jakobson, 'Studies'.

resultant configuration of two cola, one of four and one of six syllables, may bear some resemblance to the hexameter in terms of its tendency toward encapsulation of traditional diction, but the Homeric line has twelve possible colon shapes and thus many more lengths and textures of prosodic 'words'.¹⁴ On the other hand, the decasyllable metre allows more variation within individual cola, and thus adds a dimension of morphological complexity not observed in hexameter diction. While it is clear, then, that both systems of metre and phraseology will feature colonic phrases, the morphologies allowed in those phrases will be quite different.

Further, if we explore the Indo-European background of the *deseterac*, we find that the characterization 'trochaic pentameter' is no more pertinent than 'dactylic hexameter' is for the Homeric line. Both verse forms operate on what classicists have called an 'inner metric', that is, an internal pattern of quantities and colon arrangement that is much more fundamental to the verse-making process than the external label that counts metres or feet.¹⁵ For the *deseterac*, this means that the colon system is more than a series of compartments: each colon has its own normative function, the first more variable than the second, the second more likely to harbour noun phrases, and so forth. The twelve alternate cola of the Homeric line also have their specific shapes and functions in the line as a whole.

In both lines we note an increasing conservatism both metrically and phraseologically as one moves from the beginning to the end of metrical units, that is, within both lines and substantial parts of lines. It is this general principle of *right justification*, traceable to Indo-European prosody, that accounts, for example, for metrical length at the penultimate positions in each colon of the *deseterac*, on syllables three and nine. When one adds that stressed monosyllables tend to occur at the onset of a metrical unit, at the start of both cola in the decasyllable (or at syllables 1 and 5), it becomes clear how easily the jump to a trochaic pentameter characterization could have taken place. All of the odd syllables except number 7 were long and eligible for metrical stress; most prosodists were content to ignore this small discrepancy in order to fit the *deseterac* into a canonical Greco-Roman metrical category.¹⁶

¹⁴ Based on Hermann Fränkel, 'Der kallimachische und der homerische Hexameter' (*Nachrichten von der Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen*, 1926, pp. 197-229 and *Noten zu den Argonautiken des Apollonios*, Munich, 1968); Peabody, *The Winged Word*; a recent review of relevant scholarship in Harry Barnes, 'The Colometric Structure of Homeric Hexameter' (*Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies*, XXVII, 1987, pp. 125-50).

¹⁵ See the references in the preceding note. Parry, of course, recognized this reality as early as his supplementary thesis (*MHV*, pp. 191-239).

¹⁶ This discrepancy was pointed out most clearly by Svetozar Petrović in 'Poredbeno proučavanje srpskohrvatskoga epskog deseterca i sporna pitanja njegovog opisa' (*Zbornik Matice srpske za književnost i jezik*, XVII, 1969, pp. 173-203) and in

In fact, length (and eligibility for stress) at syllables 1, 3, 5 and 9 has nothing directly to do with trochaic ictus; it derives from the internal metric of the line, which in turn descends from Indo-European verse forms.

What this more fundamental explanation of the South Slav epic verse form opens up is the possibility of following phraseological structure beyond the formula to a set of *traditional rules* that oversee the creation, morphology and maintenance of formulaic diction. To simplify for present purposes,¹⁷ this explanation allows us to pinpoint the traditional features of a line, even if we cannot explain it — on available textual evidence — as a formula or formulaic system. Not only the range of substitution, but also the order of words within phrases can be accurately predicted by developing the theory from inner metric. Many of the superficial features sponsored by traditional rules, such as the peculiar behaviour of longer elements in the second colon or the special localization of initially stressed disyllables, have been observed and commented upon by earlier scholars.¹⁸ What traditional rules offer is an explanation from diachrony that is also reflected in the synchronic process of verse-making.

We may anticipate that the *theme* will vary less than the formula as we move from one tradition to the next, chiefly because idea-structures should be less dependent on language than individual formulaic idioms. By and large this expectation is fulfilled in the traditions under investigation here, but we should remember that since all ideas must be expressed in the traditional idiom, the actual verbal correspondence among instances of themes from different traditions — as opposed to the association of ideas they epitomize — may not be constant. In practice, we find that South Slav epic themes vary considerably in their recurrence, with instances sometimes very similar and sometimes reasonably divergent. Looking even more closely, we can observe that thematic patterns are internally inconsistent in amount of variation; one section of a theme may be repeated almost verbatim each time, while another section may have little or no correspondence among its occurrences.

Compositionally, it seems clear that the various kinds of formulaic and thematic structures are useful to the oral poet, but we should not limit our understanding of the patterns and their implications to mere utility. If we aim at an understanding of oral traditional texts that

‘Jakobsonov opis srpskohrvatskog epskog deseterca’ (*Naučni sastanak slavista u Vukove dane*, IV, 1974, pp. 159-66).

¹⁷ See further Foley, *Studies*, Chs 4-6.

¹⁸ E.g. Tomislav Maretić, ‘Metrika narodnih naših pjesama’ (*Rad Jugoslavenske Akademije Znanosti i Umjetnosti*, CLXVII, 1907, pp. 1-112 and CLXX, 1907, pp. 76-200), with focus on the Karadžić canon, and ‘Metrika muslimanske narodne epike’ (*Rad Jugoslavenske Akademije Znanosti i Umjetnosti*, CCLIII, 1935, pp. 181-242 and CCLV, 1936, pp. 1-76), on the Muslim tradition.

includes their cultural function as verbal art, then we should attempt the trajectory from structure to aesthetics. Only by assembling a true poetics for such texts, a poetics that begins with what we have learned about structure and then applies that knowledge to consideration of aesthetics, can we complete the task before us.¹⁹

III

In the remainder of this chapter I shall turn to specific examples of the pertinence of some of the observations made above for actual oral traditional texts. These remarks are meant to be suggestive rather than prescriptive, that is, to indicate ways in which some of these principles can help to make the comparative method more productive and lay a solid foundation for aesthetic inquiry.

The Muslim epic narratives collected by Parry and Lord offer a unique opportunity to study extended epic song of the Homeric ilk. Indeed, as Lord has written, Parry especially sought material of this type for comparison with the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.²⁰ The *guslari* of the Stolac area, from whom texts were recorded in 1934-35 and again in 1951, had in their repertoires many examples of what has been identified as a Return Song,²¹ the same story-pattern as underlies the Homeric *Odyssey* and perhaps the lost *nostoi* epics from the Trojan cycle. I have edited numerous versions of these *Ropstvo* narratives from the singers Halil Bajgorić, Ibrahim Bašić and Mujo Kukuruzović in order to provide a series of epic song-texts of the same subgenre from the same geographical area,²² a subgenre that harmonizes well with the story-structure of the *Odyssey*.

This sample of songs (and versions of songs), made in accordance with the principle of genre-dependence, has yielded insight on the multiformity of story-patterns, themes and formulaic phraseology. Various kinds of computerized concordances and other machine-assisted analyses have furnished detailed information on aspects of traditional structure from prosody through narrative pattern. With reference to diction and typical scene, for example, it has been possible to

¹⁹ I take up the matter of aesthetics in *Immanent Art: From Structure to Meaning in Traditional Oral Epic*, Bloomington, IN, London, 1991.

²⁰ See note 10.

²¹ Studies of the Return Song and related patterns in various traditions include Lord, 'The Theme of the Withdrawn Hero in Serbo-Croatian Oral Epic' (*Prilozi za književnost, jezik, istoriju, i folklor*, 35, 1969, pp. 18-30); Michael Nagler, *Spontaneity and Tradition: A Study in the Oral Art of Homer*, Berkeley, 1974, pp. 131-66; Foley, 'The Traditional Structure of Ibro Bašić's "Alagić Alija and Velagić Selim"' (*Slavic and East European Journal*, XXII, 1978, pp. 1-14); Mary Coote, 'Lying in Passages' (*Canadian-American Slavic Studies*, XV, 1981, pp. 5-23). See further Foley, *OFTR*.

²² I wish to express my thanks to Albert Lord and David E. Bynum for their generous and invaluable assistance with this work.

demonstrate three distinct levels of organization: the individual 'idiolect', the local 'dialect' and the pan-traditional 'language'. A singer will, in short, share many features of his compositional idiom with his fellows in the same local tradition, but many fewer with the tradition as excerpted from other areas and times. Both formulas and themes will vary much more at the pan-traditional level than at the local level, and there will always be a number of elements or features that, on available evidence, must be assigned to the singer's own idiolect.²³

Notwithstanding these idiosyncracies and variances, however, the more general impression one gains from such a set of analyses is the overall unity of the tradition — its homeostatic character over time and place. Comparison across areas (other Parry-Lord songs, such as those from Novi Pazar or Bijelo Polje) and across time (Marjanović's collection, for example) may not uncover a large common pool of diction or similar verbal expressions of shared thematic patterns, but the less phraseologically bound structures — the *patterns* of themes and the tale-types — will correspond to what may be a surprising degree. To my mind this overarching congruency, within the comparative principles discussed above, means not simply that a structural taxonomy can be created but also that an aesthetic context can be established. We understand the Return Songs of Stolac most deeply and faithfully, in other words, when we interpret them within this context, reading the traditional signals and supplying the referential meaning as indicated by the multiformity of the tradition as a whole.

This perspective would potentially eradicate the problem of 'structure versus aesthetics' that has plagued the study of oral traditions, especially South Slav and ancient Greek, since the inception of this kind of investigation. Instead of worrying over what seemed to some scholars to be *limited* expressivity of traditional structures like the formula and theme, we would be able to sense the tremendously *connotative* power of the traditional idiom, to understand the particular kind and scope of referentiality such structures have in oral tradition that can never be duplicated in post-traditional verbal art. The aesthetic resources of the European novel, for example, are clearly unavailable to the oral epic singer; we have been aware of that fact for some time in respect to the South Slav tradition, but have at times resisted stripping Homer of this kind of artistic control and sensitivity, with which we have been trained to feel so comfortable. But there is no reason to resist, since oral epic art has a poetics of its own, and since that poetics is so powerful and yet so finely honed an instrument.

For an example of that instrument in the hands of a master, I turn in closing to another subgenre from South Slav oral tradition, the shorter

²³ And which thus are 'traditional' only in respect to his own repertoire according to classical formulaic analysis, but which can be shown to follow the same traditional rules as the rest of his phraseology.

narratives from the Christian tradition as collected by Vuk Karadžić.²⁴ It is important to note before beginning — in consonance with the comparative principles of differentiation sketched above — that Karadžić's songs do not operate on precisely the same dynamics as the Parry-Lord Muslim songs. The Karadžić songs are shorter and more focused, and would seem in many cases to provide an opportunity for memorization and thus for an almost literary 'polishing' of a song. These characteristics help to make the Karadžić songs a logical comparand for the shorter Old English oral-derived poems, for instance; for the longer, less focused but more elaborate Homeric epics, however, I feel the Parry-Lord material offers greater congruency of genre.

In a song entitled 'The Death of Kraljević Marko' from volume two of Karadžić's collection, the oral poet Filip Višnjić harnesses the traditional referentiality of various structures to tell a story that could not be told, at least not in the same way, outside the oral tradition. In order to abbreviate, I shall quote from an earlier study.²⁵ The song opens with Marko's horse Šarac quite uncharacteristically stumbling and his now aged master viewing his own reflection in a pond:

... Marko prepares himself for death by first killing the faithful Šarac and then destroying one by one the sword, lance and mace which have served not only as martial accoutrements but also as symbols of his heroism. It is, in other words, as though he prepares for his last 'battle' by reversing the customary procedures of arming ... We cannot fail to see in this sad, funereal sequence of actions a heroic underlay: Marko performs the negative of each of the ritual oblations for battle and the poet guides us through his personal obsequies along the traditional pathway of the themes of readying the horse and arming for battle. It says a great deal about Marko as a character that his preparations for death echo the ritualized pattern of his preparations for heroic adventure during his lifetime, and it says a great deal about the poet Višnjić and his poem that so singular an event as Marko's death is presented in so traditional a manner. For what is most satisfying about this very moving account is precisely the traditional way in which the pattern helps to explain as well as simply to present a reality otherwise hard to explain and accept.

The traditional idiom is more than a useful language for oral composition, and a true poetics must go beyond the essential first step of structural analysis to a thoughtful explication of its vast echoic resources. If considered on its own terms, with proper attention to the wellsprings of meaning it alone can encode and metonymically tap, this idiom can be appreciated as the artistic instrument it undeniably is.

²⁴ I take this opportunity to thank Nada Milošević-Djordjević, Svetozar Koljević, and Svetozar Petrović for providing helpful insight into this aspect of the South Slav tradition. See further Foley, 'Umetnost i tradicija u srpskoj i staroengleskoj narativnoj poeziji' (*Književna istorija*, XIV, 1981, pp. 3-24).

²⁵ Foley, 'Literary Art', p. 202.

IV

To summarize, then, I have advocated attention to three main points in the comparative study of South Slav and other epic traditions. First, I believe we need to pay more attention to the natural heterogeneity of oral traditional forms, specifically to incongruencies in the nature of the documents, in the linguistic properties of individual traditions, and in the very genres we intend to summon for comparison. Secondly, with these distinctions in hand, we note in well-collected traditions like the South Slav the systematic variances I have called idiolect, dialect and language. A singer will have some of his own formulas and versions of themes, and will share a large percentage of his overall repertoire with the other singers in his local tradition and a much smaller percentage with singers widely separated in time and place. None the less, there exists an overarching continuity of traditional forms that to an extent defies the fragmentation of time and place and thereby confers a general unity on the traditional idiom as used by generations of singers from various areas. Thirdly, I have proposed that this kind of unity provides a natural context for the reinvesting of traditional structures with their referential meaning, the metonymic meaning that they bear within the tradition but which is often lost to the outside investigator intent on analysing the song or corpus in order to explain its existence. From this consideration of context can emerge an understanding of the aesthetics of oral traditional works on their own terms, with all of the complexity and heterogeneity we grant without reservation to literary traditions. At this moment in the study of oral traditional texts, and especially of the South Slav witness, emphasis on the trajectory from structure to aesthetics seems opportune.

PART THREE

THE COMPARATIVE DIMENSION

Chapter Nine

The concepts of centrality and marginality, and their application to the study of heroic narrative

ROBERT COCKCROFT

The endurance and resilience of Serbo-Croat heroic poetry must intrigue and challenge any person generally concerned with the Epic, and with heroic narrative as a phenomenon spanning many cultures — and in so many of them subject to change, decline and marginalization. If we can come to understand both intellectually and imaginatively why it flourished so long among the South Slavs, we will be well placed at least to eavesdrop on the true experience of the Epic or Heroic, which is that of an audience. Can we learn to read the Secondary or Literary Epic as an ‘audience’ with anything like the immediacy and interactiveness of Primary Epic, which involved the gifted singer and the alert audience with the song and with each other? To this end, is it possible to view the Primary and Secondary Heroic within a single critical frame, where each may illuminate the other by parallel and contrast? Or should I as a teacher of English Literature — forgetting my students’ lively interest in Milton, or forgetting for all practical purposes that *Paradise Lost* is an epic — seek to fire their interest in the Epic as such by centring it in folklore, and in heroism as it appears in oral culture?

Heroism is now, for most of us, a marginal concept; it tends to be pushed to one side by the looming importance of those things with which it is associated. Linked with war, it suffers under the dictates of the anti-war convention now firmly established in all the arts. Linked with the outmoded conceptions of masculinity and femininity, it will inevitably be seen as part of that ‘structure’ which ensured the psychic and social marginalization of women. Moreover, the hero has been marginalized by the anti-hero, and the heroic narrative by the narrative of comic or tragic frustration. No doubt this had to happen. Older ideas of the heroic need to have their destructive consequences exposed and their political and cultural implications unravelled. Furthermore, any re-emergence of the heroic would inevitably involve similar tendencies — conscious, or simply implicit in the centre and margins of the new heroic vision — to political manipulation. Elsewhere in this book Michael Branch and Seppo Knuuttila both show how the construction of

Finland's national epic reflected this kind of inbuilt bias, responsive as it was to real need and evolving circumstances. But are there no political implications in our current repression or neglect of the heroic? Since Virgil refashioned Homer, heroism has constantly been redefined, and the redefinitions in their turn overlaid and fused. If heroism connotes endurance, resilience, hope, continuity — rather than destructive pride or stoical suffering — how in the long term can any culture survive without it? If we are looking for a model fit for a 'multicultural society', to help make sense of, and to energize, that seemingly self-contradictory ideal, the Serbo-Croat tradition might point us in the right direction — being itself a record of cultures in collision, crises survived, and idioms transformed.

Accordingly, I aim both to suggest a constructive way of relating other kinds of heroic narrative to the oral tradition (working towards a recovery of the 'audience') and to offer a method for examining 'central' and 'marginal' elements within that tradition itself. In order to achieve this, I shall in what follows (I) offer a working definition of 'centrality' and 'marginality'; (II) propose a species of *critical rhetoric* to show how these two concepts might be used to locate latent critical arguments; and (III) look very provisionally in the light of this rhetoric at the three paired sets of examples drawn from English/Scots and from Serbo-Croat.

I

There is simply no room here to examine all the bearings of centrality and marginality from child psychology¹ to post-structuralism² and feminism.³ I shall concentrate on the most familiar and useful senses of these terms. We all know from experience what it means to be a central or a marginal member of a group; and the causes and people that we care about are similarly poised — a faculty might for example be marginalized within a university. And insofar as we conceive the visual and verbal scenes of art as something external to ourselves and discontinuous with our daily experience, we discern central and marginal elements within those scenes. But how far does that discernment bear out our sense of a discontinuity between life and art? The artistic object compellingly placed at the centre of our attention may cover, under the aesthetic stasis — which may be the complete outline of a story as well as a single visual image — the marginalization

¹ For example in Piaget, as noted in Harold Bloom, *A Map of Misreading*, Oxford, New York, 1975, pp. 52-53.

² See for example Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*, London, 1983, pp. 139-41, 215-16, 222-23.

³ As noted in Ann Jefferson, David Robey (eds), *Modern Literary Theory: A Comparative Introduction*, 2nd edn, London, 1986, pp. 212-14, 219-20 (chapter by Toril Moi).

of images representing other categories of people, their unsatisfied needs and their unrealized potential. This we may call repressive marginalization; and we should ask ourselves which features of the text — or of our reading, or of our reception of the text as members of a group — may serve as effective counters to it in art as in life.

There are of course many such means, though our sense of marginalization may grow acuter as we grow older. The sense of unbridgeable distance between centre and margin might however be, in itself, the troublesome product of a passing phase of culture. It might be the last crisis of a moribund individualism, destined to be succeeded by the recovery of metaphysical values or the establishment of materialist and collective ones. But even in that event, marginality would still impinge as a predicament or a threat. The church, school, party, class or ethnic group might still be driven by resentment or compassion felt towards others not similarly centred. They might also feel excluded from the full development of their potential as a group; and they may also fear the perversion of that potential.

The issue is complicated by the simultaneous emergence of multicultural societies in many parts of the world (and of fundamentalism in others), by recent insistence on the plurality of meaning in literary texts, and now by an emergent view of the human mind itself as a plurality. All this casts suspicion on centrality itself. Individual cultures, meanings, or portions of the psyche can only claim centrality at the cost of others, thus made subject to repressive marginalization. This same plurality, however, points us towards a different conception of centrality and marginality — whether we view it as a fulcrum around which we are balanced, a common centre of power at which all are represented, or a common base on which we stand. It is interesting to reflect that in Elizabethan English ‘the centre’ meant the solid earth beneath us, which became a metaphorical measure of certainty. Witness Shakespeare’s Polixenes:

If I mistake
In those foundations which I build upon
The centre is not strong enough to bear
A schoolboy’s top.

Winter’s Tale, II, i, ll. 99-102

Interestingly, Polixenes identifies ‘the centre’ with his own crazed solipsism, which has thrust him out beyond the margins of reality — while with all the power of a king he strives to bend reality to fit his fantasy. In contrast to this, constructive marginalization stresses the inadequacy and incompleteness of every word and concept in relation to the whole that seeks expression and the centre that maintains connection and continuity.

This is seen both in the smaller structures, such as the movement of verse, and in the larger such as the constructive dialogue of cultures

which this present pairing of Literary and Oral Heroics seeks to promote. The chapters in this book by Karl Reichl on the parallelisms of Turkic poetry and Leea Virtanen on the singers of the Setu region of Estonia both reflect this point with regard to oral poetics. Margins and centres inform our rhythmical sense as half-lines turn about their caesuras and parallelisms are completed — as the near-synonymous ‘other word’ which the Setu singer feels to be so essential to her song, is found. And many cultures show a two-sidedness expressive of division, but equally essential to cultural continuity. Many comparable oppositions can be cited, for example oral poetry and forum poetry, male songs and female songs, religious songs and profane songs. Going further, we might take as a test-case for this problem of plurality, and this need for a constructive centre, the history and culture of the South Slavs. Is it to be viewed as singular or plural — Christian or Islamic or Marxist, urban or rural? What kind of centrality can unite or balance these elements? And what has been the effect on them of repressive marginalization — how for example, was the emergent nineteenth-century self-image of the South Slavs, the movement towards nationhood and literate culture, affected by the discreet setting aside of Vuk Karadžić’s collection of obscene or indecorous poems?

For over against the centres and margins of ‘Life’ itself, we commonly place ‘Art’ as a reflective or visionary medium — in that ‘discontinuous’ opposition already alluded to. ‘Realistic’ art will then reflect our centres and margins as we ourselves perceive them. ‘Visionary’ art (which in this context might just include obscene verses!), may represent the breaking out of those psychic, sexual or social forces, rivals for the ‘centre’, which in our ‘normal’ life we have contrived to forget or fence off — and in the degraded form of fantasy it might represent a wishful transposition of our centres and our margins, the impotent desire of the marginalized for the pleasure, power, knowledge or serenity of the centre. The usefulness of these distinctions might be borne out by a brief glance at ‘The Song of Bagdad’.⁴ First, we might challenge the historical record to prove that it is not in one respect a fantasy — compensating for the situation of Bosnia at the very margins of the Ottoman Empire, and perhaps for the effects of later changes of regime. But secondly, is it not profoundly realistic in its stylized insistence on the importance of domestic, communal and military routine and ceremony, with all their attendant values? And, thirdly, might it not also be called visionary in its actual reversal of the central and marginal roles, as Fatima both emulates male heroics and — in her miraculous breach of Baghdad’s impenetrable wall — renders them redundant? More of this later; it is now time to sketch

⁴ In Salih Ugljanin’s version of 22 November 1934 (Parry No. 668), as printed in Milman Parry, Albert Bates Lord (colls, eds, trans), *Serbo-Croatian Heroic Songs, I: Novi Pazar: English Translations*, Cambridge, MA, Belgrade, 1953-54, pp. 68-69.

out a more wide-ranging systematic approach, in other words a 'topical' rhetoric.

II

Whether detecting their repressive or their constructive operation, we may look methodically for the effects of centrality and marginality through the following main aspects of Heroic Narrative, both literary and oral: (A) its audience; (B) its authorship or production; (C) its narrative type; (D) the persons of its narrative; (E) its language; (F) its locale; (G) its genre. Of course, as with all such schemes, boundaries might seem fluid and arbitrary and overlaps inevitable — and I might for example have added *time* to the scheme if I had had the *space*. But if the scheme is worth taking up, it is worth taking over and modifying in line with the specific interests of each user. Oral Epic, or Heroic Song, should begin to be apparent from the examples which I will suggest, following a very summary explication of each *topos*.

(A) *Audience*. How is the current audience of a work related to its original audience? How directly does the work address the current concerns either of the original audience or of the present one? And is this address open, covert or accidental (perceived by the audience rather than proposed by the work)? Do the audience perceive themselves on the margins or sidelines of the work, or as drawn into its centre? Do the audience — the synchronous audience of the Oral Heroic, or the dispersed critical 'audience' of the Literary Heroic — exert active control over the words of the text or their interpretation?

We might view the audience of Serbo-Croat heroic song — as a real listening audience coexistent in time and place and crucially interactive with the singer — as our model of a centrally-placed audience; yet, as Svetozar Koljević has shown in his *The Epic in the Making*,⁵ it was easy enough for the stories and heroes of earlier epochs to lose their effective emotional and historical relevance to the situation of their audiences, while the regaining of this imaginative urgency depended on a fairly special set of social, artistic and historical conditions. If we are to compare this process with the evolution of the literary Epic in relation to its audience, we should see what strategies poets have devised for giving pointed political or religious meaning to more distant times. Virgil can indirectly recommend the stoical acceptance of a new and autocratic political order, and can mirror political immaturity and irresponsibility in the figures — at once remote in time and rawly topical — of Aeneas/Antony and Dido/Cleopatra.⁶ As a Christian humanist, a republican and a man, Milton relates the figures of Adam, Eve, Christ and Satan directly to the issues of conscience, freedom and

⁵ Oxford, 1980 [hereafter Koljević 1980]. See especially Part One (pp. 11-94).

⁶ See for example the discussion in Kenneth Quinn, *Virgil's 'Aeneid': a Critical Description*, London, 1968, Ch. 2, III, 'The Problems Solved', pp. 34-58 [hereafter Quinn].

reason — and to the nature of marriage and the subordination of women — as these things were debated during the English Revolution and its aftermath. In contrast, the great gift of Serbo-Croat heroic song seems to lie in its combination of an even more complex superimposition of historical motifs with a much less strenuous, exacting and élitist approach to its audience. Koljević has demonstrated this in the case of 'Prince Marko and his Brother Andrijash' from which two examples are shortly to be drawn. Yet if we consider the electric effect that Milton's words 'He for God only, she for God in him' (*PL*, IV, 1.299) can now produce — the palpable pressure of denial from the audience at any reading aloud — we will not perhaps feel so very far from the situation in which words could be added, subtracted or changed in response to the audience's composition, or its mood. Such words bring writer and audience into confrontation, whatever the intervening period; and in their unvarying 'authoritative' form, they also bring today's listener into confrontation with the original 'fit audience, though few'. The women at the centre of today's audience feel the marginalized pressure of women and of women's rights on the original readers, male or female. But here we overlap with:

(B) *Authorship or Production*. Are the specific words in which a work is delivered, and the voice or pen speaking, singing or writing them in any specific instance, central to the existence and persistence of that work within its culture, or marginal? Does the culture think more readily of the 'author' than of the work associated with his or her name, or vice versa? In what modes does the author place or impose his or her self, centrally or marginally, within the work?

Of course, as in Chaucer's *Troilus*, 'myn auctour' might in the literary tradition be appealed to as a source outside the work (of translation, or adaptation) guaranteeing its veracity — or as an ironic way of disclaiming the work's actual and radical originality; and though there seems to be no equivalent convention for Serbo-Croat poetry, it could be that the great singers recorded by Karadžić felt a comparable relationship, both authenticating and adaptable, with the familiar stories, narrative elements and formulas within which they worked. Nevertheless, within this particular oral tradition there is plainly no proprietorship in the text. This convincingly demonstrates that a text can exist without an author, and is a gift for any teacher or theorist asked to comment on the long-standing debate between those like Roland Barthes⁷ who seek to abolish the author, and those like Harold Bloom⁸ who see the Strong Poet (the quintessential Author) as a being at once *fathered* by a great precursor and *self-created* in his reactive 'swerve' away from that precursor. Perhaps the singers of Karadžić (and of Parry and Lord) show us the right measure of truth on both sides — the

⁷ Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, trans. S. Heath, London, 1977, pp. 143-47.

⁸ Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, Oxford, New York, 1973: *passim*.

centrality of a creative *voice*, which in their case reacts not as an individual psyche to an individual precursor, but in the right of a whole community burdened with an experience and a need at once continuous with and different from those of their ancestors — including perhaps the need to fashion themselves as worthy successors. The respect and honour due to such a singer would indeed be marginal to — and consequent upon — his audience's involvement with his song. We can quite appropriately compare the ways in which other poets figure in other songs, both Literary and Oral, as points of reference for the imagination or judgement of their audiences. We might instance the naive social and moral marginality of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* persona, or the centrality of Dante as a poet, lover, citizen, philosopher and Christian soul, as he represents himself in the *Divina Commedia*. And given the importance of lineage within the genealogical structure of Somali society — as revealed by Said Samatar's chapter in this book — the identity and prestige of the oral poet are both central to the meaning and impact of his poem, especially perhaps when that poem forms part of a controversial political 'chain'.

(C) *Narrative type*. What issues of importance to its audience are marginalized within the narrative structure of the work under scrutiny? What issues are placed at the Centre? Or does the work achieve a concentricity of elements — even of those which at first seem to be subordinated to others? Or is the narrative itself centred on a meaning external to it (as in allegory)? Is it single or 'polyphonic'; and in the latter case what is central to the interwoven strands? Does it disclose its events or its meaning directly, or indirectly through one or more species of trope?

As an instance of this last, we might cite the Serbo-Croat 'Old Vujadin',⁹ where a whole life of outlawry is revealed in a powerful *synecdoche* by the old hero's speeches at the point of torture and death. Indeed, the distinct types of narrative comprehended within the full range of this heroic tradition — the battles, the aftermaths of battle, the captivities and rescues, the weddings, the accounts of the building of cities and monasteries, seem generally to relate as parts to a single great whole. This tendency to *synecdoche* might be compared with the tradition of the Literary Epic, with its massively crafted, singly controlled, self-contained and balanced wholes — from the *Aeneid* to Joyce's *Ulysses*. There may however be a greater singleness of purpose or unity of mood in the 'fragments' than in the larger constructed 'wholes'. Other bearings of this *topos* will be seen in our final section.

(D) *Persons of the Narrative*. Who holds the centre of the narrative and who is marginalized? Or is the centre held by a relationship of

⁹ As found in *Marko the Prince: Serbo-Croat Heroic Songs*, trans. Anne Pennington, Peter Levi, introd. and notes Svetozar Koljević, London, 1984, pp. 136-38 [hereafter *Marko the Prince*].

persons or by what those persons embody for the audience? If the narrative includes divine or infernal persons, can they on their vertical axis be viewed as part of the work's centrality, or are they essentially marginal or instrumental to the human scene?

Both in the broader context of the Epic and Heroic and in the Serbo-Croat tradition, attention and anticipation will be centred on the most active hero or heroine. Whenever a journey is involved, he or she forms a moving point of focus; but recalling the root meaning of 'focus' ('hearth'), and with it perhaps, Donne's image of the compass ('Thy firmness makes my circle just'), we may often perceive that the hero is centred on the static point represented by a 'hero mother' or 'faithful love' as guardian of the hearth. Do historical and cultural conditions make this specially characteristic of the Serbo-Croat poem? It is also of course a feature of the epic *Odyssey* and the comic epic *Ulysses*; but in view of Marko Kraljević's own standing as a comic-epic hero, it is significant that in 'Prince Marko and Mina of Kostur'¹⁰ the hero only leaves home on compulsion, and that the poem's drama derives from a shattering of its domestic centre — the killing of Marko's mother and the abduction of his 'faithful love'. Here however the pain is marginalized and the resolution famously comic. In 'The Wedding of King Vukašin',¹¹ which is related by a darker irony to the figure of Marko, indirectly foreshadowing two sides of his nature in its characterization of his despicable father and his noble mother, the domestic centre is divided and betrayed by the treachery of 'the bitch Vidosava'. Her acts of treachery reach their climax as her husband Momčilo, about to regain the safety of his keep by ascending the length of 'linen rag' let down at hideous cost by his faithful sister, falls to his death through the action of his wife — in her response to Vukašin's dishonourable suit. Vukašin, however, has the grace to accept Momčilo's dying advice, and to marry the woman who upheld the 'centre' rather than the one who betrayed it. Koljević describes the child of this union as both 'national hero' and 'scapegoat'.¹² In other words he is built on such a grand scale as to contain in himself both centre and margins. As 'scapegoat' he carries into the wilderness the darker aspects of a compromise with tyranny, concealing them behind the realistic comedy of a born survivor, a master of finely intuited defiance. And on another side he can touch sanctity, as he does in 'Prince Marko and the Hawk'.¹³ This brings us briefly to the question of the 'vertical axis' mentioned above. My impression so far is that in the Serbo-Croat heroic poems the divine is more commonly represented by a centring force than by one or more persons, as it is in large-scale epics. The 'flying

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 47-54.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 85-92.

¹² Koljević 1980, p. 178.

¹³ *Marko the Prince*, pp. 36-37.

hawk, grey bird' which, in the blind woman's song,¹⁴ figures the prophet Elijah, carries in that darting moment a transforming impulse of faith. Other poems represent the divine through a miraculous providential ordering.

(E) *Language*. What variations of style or rhetoric exist within the single text, group of texts, different recorded texts of the same song, or compared texts from different periods or cultures, which are under our scrutiny? How do changes or contrasts in language represent variations in the relationship of margins and centres?

It will be a matter of looking at characteristic linguistic and rhetorical devices of contrasted poems and cultures. We might for example compare two very different uses of the device of negation in terms of marginality and moral judgement. In *Paradise Lost*, I, ll.730-51 Milton brilliantly evokes the beauty and glamour of pagan mythology in his picture of the fall of Mulciber, the architect of Pandaemonium — and then curtly marginalizes beauty in favour of brutal truth, reminding us that lying pagan poets can write like angels just as devils can build like angels. In contrast, the Slavonic antithesis which, in 'Prince Marko and his Brother Andrijash', reveals the heroes' identity — 'but they were not,/My friends I tell you, they were not two poor men'¹⁵ — does not negate or even marginalize the 'two poor men' with whom the poet at first confronts us. If Marko images the good and the evil, the survival and the resilience, the accepted need for forgiveness, of all the 'poor men' and women to whose culture he is the representative hero, then he and his brother must continue throughout this poem to represent any 'two poor men' who might be divided by passion or conflicting interests, but who must maintain their union in the face of common adversity. Thus this 'antithesis' is not of course truly antithetical. In a less handy phrase we might call it a figure of reversal, transposition, or even of superimposition — a simultaneous retention and reversal of a given set of centres and margins. No doubt similar comparisons could be made between the expression of the Literary and the Oral Heroic through the whole range of their language.

(F) *Locale*. How is the heroic cosmos or landscape structured physically and/or figuratively? What is at its margins laterally and vertically; and what is the relationship between these spatial bounds and the centre of human interest within the work? Do they define or control it, or it them; or is there an interaction? Do the spatial boundaries of the

¹⁴ As 'recorded from a blind woman of Grgurevtsi in Srem by Lukijan Mushitski, the abbot of the neighbouring monastery of Shishatovats, and sent to Vuk Karadžić in 1817'. Headnote and text in *Marko the Prince*, pp. 7-19.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 31-33. See Koljević's penetrating discussion of the poem, with the full text in Serbo-Croat and English (Koljević 1980, pp. 52-58). 'Slavonic antithesis' is a widespread device in Slavic oral poetry whereby hypotheses are proposed only to be denied.

work represent the human impulse to marginalize forces that will, contrarily, assert their influence?

Locale ranges from the significant space between the walls and hearth of a house, to the bounds of the cosmos. We might compare the epic spaces of Homer, Dante, Langland, Ariosto, Camoens, Spenser and Milton, and all their significant differences, with the Serbo-Croat epic landscape to see more sharply what is specific to it. Mountain barriers, meadows, rivers, forests, clearings, inns, whitewashed towers and churches seem to be uniquely combined in this tradition. But some things overleap cultural boundaries; a similar desolation invests the cold and roofless hearth in the ninth-century Welsh lament 'Dark is Cynddylan's hall tonight/With no fire, no bed'¹⁶ and the dervish's recollection in 'Banović Strahinja':¹⁷

the plague had murdered them, men and women,
and the hearthstone was cold, there was no one,
and the whole house was falling to ruin,
falling to ruin, and falling apart,
green elder trees were sprouting from the walls ...

Both of these express the horror felt when such a focal centre is invaded, defiled and effaced — as it is, again, in Aeneas's narrative of the fall of Troy. Such things are normally held beyond our margins and met only in our nightmares. They can be coped with through tragedy or comedy, the sad and stressful 'piety' of Aeneas's voyage between the lost centre and the centre to come, or the truthful fantasy of Marko comically pushing the Sultan off *his* centre — his prayer rug — as he does in 'Prince Marko Knows his Father's Sword'.¹⁸ And yet of course the Sultan's Stamboul remains the real and fearful power-centre, invasive of all its vassals' centres.

(G) *Genre*. What admixture of genres, or what sub-genre of the Epic or Heroic, is manifest in the text or song under scrutiny? How is it related to the expectations of the whole culture, or complex of cultures, producing it or receiving it?

We might consider *mode* as an alternative term here — particularly where Serbo-Croat is concerned with reference to the main distinction between the tragedies surrounding Kosovo and the comic survivalism of Marko.¹⁹ But though the almost complete mutual marginalization of comedy and tragedy in these two main strains of the Christian tradition gives a particular significance in this context to this modal opposition,

¹⁶ See *The Penguin Book of Welsh Verse*, trans. A. Conran, J. E. C. Williams, Harmondsworth, 1967, pp. 90-91.

¹⁷ *Marko the Prince*, pp. 112-30 (121-22). The hero's home has been similarly devastated.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

¹⁹ Koljević argues for this distinction (Koljević 1980, p. 191) and it is reflected in the structure of the selection in *Marko the Prince*.

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²² Texts in James Kinsley (ed.), *The Oxford Book of Ballads*, Oxford, 1969, pp. 239-40, and in *Marko the Prince*, pp. 31-33 (see note 15 above).

interesting is to compare the Serbian Orthodox and English Puritan versions of this higher heroism. Milton's Adam on leaving Paradise is assured of 'a paradise within thee, happier far', of a Providence 'by things deemed weak/ Subverting worldly strong', and finally 'that suffering for truth's sake/Is fortitude to highest victory,/And to the faithful death the gate of life' (XII, ll. 587, 567-71). A similar sense of suffering, of the worldly invincibility of evil in the longer or shorter term, is conveyed in the Serbo-Croat poem by the constantly mounting tally — like the progression of a counting folksong or carol — of the forces moving into action, with the last Pasha in the line always one too many for the Christian heroes. The legendary failings of many of those here finding martyrdom (including the odious King Vukašin) are overlooked in their common action to establish 'the empire of Heaven' — to found an invincible memory for a Christian people. Both poems have precise historical and political meaning. Memory bides its time waiting for the rise of nationalism, while Milton's 'weakness' will perhaps 'subvert worldly strong' within decades. But Milton's Calvinist sense of human depravity — deepened by his bitterness at the failure of the English to found through revolution a true Christian republic — contrasts strongly with what seems to be an Orthodox Christian assertion of the innate goodness of Man. Thus one poem seems to be central to a united front (it was of course recorded in a period of rising nationalism), and the other to express the condition of marginalization in a divided culture. And yet Milton is seen by prominent modern critics like Christopher Hill²⁶ and Tom Paulin²⁷ as the standard bearer of a continuing republican tradition, and as the voice of a silent majority of the marginalized.

Given the constraints of space, I must invite my reader to provide or fill out the final comparison. I referred earlier to 'The Song of Bagdad', and suggested visionary quality in the emergence of Fatima to efface the expected hero Alija. It would be interesting to compare her, and another Serbo-Croat heroine from the other side of the Muslim/Christian divide, with a contrasted pair of English epic heroines. We might for instance choose Jevrosima, and place over against her and Fatima Spenser's Britomart and Milton's Eve. If the point of our comparison was to assess the extent to which women, in various significantly different examples of Oral and Literary Epic, break out of their marginal position or are subtly confirmed in it, we might concentrate on a telling detail — the *hair* of all four women. Fatima returning to the domestic 'centre' after her triumph accepts that her shorn head would normally be a disabling disgrace (and reverts to her subservient role?); Jevrosima tears hers out of her head in a heroic effort to save her brother (what symbolism might be seen in that?); Britomart's conquers her lover

²⁶ Cf. Christopher Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution*, London, 1977.

²⁷ Cf. Tom Paulin, *The Faber Book of Political Verse*, London, 1986: Introduction.

where her weapons failed (*FQ*, IV, vi, stanzas 20-22); Eve's is 'in wanton ringlets ... impl(ying) subjection' (*PL*, IV, ll. 307-08). We might also ask whether Adam's contrasted perceptions of Eve combine Vidosava and Jevrosima in one person! Finally we could compare the two widely travelled heroines with the two who stand and fall each in a single spot — though in the last lines of *Paradise Lost* Eve becomes a traveller.

In conclusion, this scheme of *topoi* is offered not to increase the bulk of commentary but its range, selectiveness and relevance, and to bring the audiences of the Oral and Literary Heroic into a reciprocal relationship of centres and margins.

Chapter Ten

What is an heroic lay?

Some reflections on the Germanic, Serbo-Croat and Fula

A.T. HATTO

The following is an attempt to discover what three distinct traditions of shorter heroic poems may have in common. And it aims incidentally to advance a grown-up use of genre-terminology in a branch of scholarship much given to childish ways.

One of the factors which has bedevilled the use of our terminology has been that in the days of European and other nationalisms it was felt that every nation must have its 'epic', whether it had one or not. More recently, in one great region of the world, it has been felt that each ethnic unit — unless it had 'misbehaved' itself politically — had a 'democratic right', if not to an 'epic' then at least to an 'epos', and to publication of the same. Some units even claimed an 'epopee'.

The genres of one poetic culture never coincide with those of any other, not even with those of near neighbours. Thus comparativists have to work with a meta-poetics that is as yet unwritten and may never come to pass. It is therefore a hazardous enterprise to discuss Serbo-Croat heroic song, the Fulani *hoddu* and the Germanic heroic lay together. But I will dare to say at once that in my view the Serbo-Croat specimens float between 'heroic lay' and 'ballad', and the Fulani *hoddu* between 'heroic lay' and 'shorter epic', whereas the Germanic 'heroic lay' at first is neatly bound.

Quite briefly, careful use is needed of the following terms in descending order of length:

1. I suggest we revive the obsolete English word 'epopee' for large-scale amorphous compilations of heroic and sub-heroic narrative material, like the *Shahnameh*. Such are mostly literary works, but the vast assemblages of already full-scale epics in the laboratory recordings of the twentieth-century wholesaling Kirghiz bards Sagymbay and Sayakbay, and lately of Yusup Mamay of Sinkiang (Xingjiang) covering seven or eight generations of heroes, offer examples of technically oral 'epopees'. Here one may remark that where there is a very rich patron, like the State or a scholar from an affluent university, there is always a danger of a businesslike bard producing an oral epopee.

2. The next term is 'epic' as used by the leading English-speaking critics since the perceptive Scot W.P. Ker published his *Epic and Romance* in 1897. I myself unhesitatingly apply Ker's notion of an 'epic' to such diverse creations as the *Iliad*, the Sumerian *Gilgamesh and the Huluppu-tree* and *Lugalbanda*, the mid-nineteenth-century Kirghiz *Almambet*, *Er Kökčö* and *Ak-erkeč*, the Ob-Ugrian *Song of the Golden Hero-Prince*, the Yakut *Xan Jargistay* and the *Mohave Epic*, yet with distinctions within the genre such as 'Monumental Epic' (*Iliad*; *Gilgamesh*; probably the Fang *mvet* epic of Zwe Nguema); 'Shorter Epic' — allowed for as long ago as Aristotle — such as the Ob-Ugrian heroic songs in general and some Fulani *hoddu*, as I shall suggest below, and 'biographical epic'. The term 'epic' as Ker used it naturally referred to 'Primary Epic' as distinct from 'Secondary Epic' such as the *Aeneid*, *Paradise Lost*, *Kalevala* and, it seems, the *Ramayana*. In standing out for a responsible use of the word 'epic' by users of English, both British and foreign, I declare no national interest: Britain has no primary epic to its name, for *Beowulf* is an elegiac-heroic poem at the post-oral level, a truly marvellous pastiche from mainly oral sources. I can thus afford to be firm in my request for a discriminating use of the word 'epic' in English, especially when coupled with the adjective 'heroic'.

3. The next level is that of the 'heroic lay', the short dramatic-narrative poem of heroic content transcending all balladry by virtue of its high seriousness and appropriate language. This was also clearly perceived as a genre by Ker. It is the one I am engaged to probe.

But first let me say a word on 'epos' which, fortunately, is almost obsolete in English — killed by such critical advances as Ker's. In other than English usage, can 'epos' mean anything else, vaguely, than 'narrative', when in German, for example, it is applied both to 'literary chivalric romances' (*Ritterepen*) and 'oral or literary heroic epics' (*Heldenepen*), or in Russian to more or less general narrative folklore? I respectfully suggest that scholars of the non-English-speaking world throw out 'epos' in discussions of 'epics' and 'heroic lays' and work hard for a viable terminology if they have not one already. Or perhaps not throw out 'epos' entirely, but keep it by as a baby's comforter for those who cannot stomach it that they have no true 'epics' in their traditions. And I further suggest that American colleagues resist the infiltration by recent immigrants of the word 'epos' into such discussions as ours and not let it in by what is now the front-door of the English-speaking world.

Despite the differences of the Serbo-Croat heroic song, the Fulani *hoddu* and the Germanic heroic lay already referred to, they are linked by one salient feature, namely their varieties of the heroic ethos which are *tenser* than average, a salient feature which makes in turn for *brevity* of verbal expression rather than *prolixity* — hence the relatively shorter poetic form. Long-winded expressions of a tense

heroic ethos would surely swiftly descend into mock-epic? A tense ethos, however well heroes may disguise it with nonchalance and courtesy, surely breeds laconism and pregnant 'moments' in which visual gestures condense much action? Confirmation of such a view is found, for example, in the wonderfully pithy prose *xosun* (hero) narratives of North Yakutia, telling of men with tensest ethos.

In shorter heroic poems of the sort envisaged, the peaks of action and rhetoric are highly accentuated in relation to the rest — a good shorter heroic narrative has a more immediately seizable 'shape' than a longer poem can possibly have, however well constructed. Indeed, the prime reason why so few heroic lays ever provided an encompassing framework or matrix for full-scale epic treatment is that they were *too well-shaped* for this to be possible, their inner narrative logic was too firmly structured for it to be bent into compatibility with other shapely material. Only two or three proto-*byliny*, only three or four earlier Finnish hero-songs accreted in the field, without patriotic or scholarly midwifery. Indeed, one may well ask how many Serbo-Croat heroic songs accreted in the field?

After voicing these widespread ideas I shall content myself with displaying some marked 'shapes' culled from the three traditions of shorter heroic narrative poetry before us, whilst declining to use my right of hot pursuit over the meta-poetical frontiers, that is, I shall stop short at the steep descent of Serbo-Croat heroic song into ballad and the gentle ascent of the Fula *hoddu* into 'shorter epic'.

To say that the Germanic lay affords the genre-type is not to give it a privileged or exemplary position, any more than one would allow this to the *Iliad* among 'monumental epics', except on purely aesthetic grounds. To the comparativist all traditions of shorter heroic lays, as of monumental epics, are equally idiosyncratic, simply because they have been *cultivated* by gifted poets.

The orally delivered Germanic lay, judging from the few surviving and often fragmentary textual specimens, tended strongly towards being got by heart after search for *les mots justes*, though with obvious signs of a prior stage of extemporization. The Langobardic *Lay of Hildebrand* of c.650 A.D., using an Ostrogothic setting and itself overlaid with Bavarian and Old Saxon, offers a late specimen of the art. By the time the poem breaks off in the middle of the sixty-eighth line, we are sure we have a tragedy in which a father is forced by his code of honour knowingly to slay an only son who denies his paternity. For concentration of the subject-matter, this lay lacks even a near rival among heroic poems. Bristling with tensions, innuendoes, understatements ('I swear you never had dealings with so closely related a man ...') and laconisms as it does, one asks can it really have any dominant 'peaks'? Yet the peaks are well marked: of course the catastrophe at the end; the post-middle and highest peak, at which father Hildebrand realizes that he will never be able to convince his son of the

truth of the situation and, with a mighty cry to God Almighty, testifies that a calamity is upon them. But the opening is fully a match for all that follows. I will give a line for line audience-reaction:

- Line 1 'I heard it told ...' (A half-line, leaving an unmeasured half-line for us to quieten down and give the scop a hearing.)
 Line 2 'that challengers had met for a duel' (So it is a contest with serious legal and political implications.)
 Line 3 'Hildebrand and Hadubrand, between two armies' (My God, kinsmen ... ! Cousins? ... Brothers? ... [as the alliterating *H* coupled with the second element — *brand* requires] With two armies as witnesses the issue cannot be fudged.)
 Line 4 'the bonded pair, father-and-son (*sunufatarungo*) set their armour to rights ...' (so it is as close as that! [Father and son(s)] constituted one indivisible person in ancient Germanic law.)

In other words, given the tragic expectation of the genre, after two-and-a-half lines of text the audience has been forced to deduce *that* a family tragedy of the first order is about to be enacted. It is fortunate that the torso takes us past the point at which the scop has worked out impeccably *how* this must come to pass.

The 'shape' of the *Lay of Hildebrand* is thus: 1. an initial high peak, full of tragic foreboding; 2. probably somewhat past the middle (if the exact middle could be known) a loftiest peak, at which Hildebrand is compelled to accept his cruel fate; 3. an end at which the audience's and Hildebrand's worst fears are fulfilled (lost). The first and second peaks, however, are not enhanced by visual imagery or gesture. At the first, the ranks of the two armies suggest implacable opposites. At the second, we may imagine Hildebrand raising a hand or hands to God. There is one unbroken time, one unshifted scene.¹

As a second example I take the Eddaic *Atlakvioa*.² This lay of just over 350 lines distributed among forty-four strophes of varying lengths and rhythmical patterns falls into three parts. In the first, the Niflung Gunnar receives and with his brother Högni considers a sinister invitation to Hunland from his brother-in-law Atli, and decides to go (str. 1-13). In the second, Gunnar and Högni are fettered and put under extreme pressure to divulge the whereabouts of the Niflung treasure,

¹ For interpretation of the *Hildebrandlied* see A. T. Hatto, 'On the excellence of the *Hildebrandlied*: a comparative study of dynamics' (*Modern Language Review*, 68, 1973, pp. 820-38); reprinted in A. T. Hatto, *Essays on Medieval German and Other Poetry* (Anglica Germanica, Series 2), Cambridge, 1980, pp. 93-116, 329-34.

² *Atlakvioa*. The sinister nature of Atli's invitation to Gunnar in Part I is indicated by the cold voice of the Hunnish emissary Knefroor, by the ring sent by Guorún entwined with a wolf's hair, and most of all by Atli's dangling of wealth in Hunland before those who were far richer than he, the lords of the Niflung treasure. This shadow falls over Gunnar's hall from str. 2 onwards. I follow the interpretation of Ursula Dronke, *The Poetic Edda*, I, *Heroic poems*, Oxford, 1969, pp. 3-74.

but each triumphs over his tormentor and death in his own way (str. 14-33). In the third, the Niflungs' sister Guorún, who had warned them in Parts I and II, wreaks terrible vengeance on Atli by serving up their children as meat and burning the whole company in the hall (str. 34-44).

Part I ends with a journey to mark the change of scene from the Rhine to Hunland (str. 11-13). Part II has a short journey from Atli's hall to the snakepit into which Gunnar is cast (str. 28-29), and the reverse journey (str. 33). Thus there are four scenes in all: one in Part I, Gunnar's Hall (the Invitation); two in Part II, Atli's Hall (the Death of Högni) and the Snakepit (the Death of Gunnar); and one in Part III, (Gudrun's Revenge).

Part I culminates in the very dense and riddling str. 11, adumbrating the fate of the Niflung treasure if Gunnar does not return ('The wolf shall rule/the inheritance of the Niflungar ...'), a high point of skaldesque rhetoric. With his counsellors silent, it was Gunnar's choice as King to go, knowing he would not return. In Part II, the lofty peak of Högni's triumphant laughter as the Huns cut his heart from his body is surpassed by the sublime peak of Gunnar's dying, for he had required his brother's death in order to be sure that the secret of the treasure should go down with himself, and, unlike Högni, he had offered kingly non-resistance. Part III is a massive plateau of total revenge and destruction by the ecstatically active Guorún.

There can be no doubt that the high peak of the entire lay is the Death of Gunnar. Thus, as evidently also in the *Lay of Hildebrand*, the culmen is placed not at the end but soon after the middle, and a moment's reflection tells why. A tragic end was obligatory to the genre of the Germanic heroic lay. There could be no major surprise or peripeteia at the end. Thus the high-peak had to come earlier. It comes at the point by which the poet *has shown why, by the inexorable logic of events*, the tragic end must come.

The two peaks in Part II are well-marked for both sight and sound: Högni's laughter as the knife goes to his heart, soon to be shown to Gunnar quivering on a platter; Gunnar in the snakepit striking up his harp. Visual and audile elements are general in the Revenge, with men howling and flames leaping, and the gleaming face of 'gosling-bright' Guorún outshining all.

One asks oneself whether *Atlakvía* could not have ended with Gunnar's moral victory in the snakepit as the obligatory tragic end? This would have left the high-peak at the end, with none in the post-middle. It would have left a question-mark over Guorún's solidarity with her siblings. It would have left a treacherous deed — treacherous even by prevailing Germanic standards — unavenged. Is the tragic figure at the end perhaps Atli? Or is it rather Guorún? Or the whole Hunnish House? I think the tragic figure is the Burgundian stirps collectively — the poem is of the Fall of the Niflungs. It would have

been more fitting, therefore, had Guorún, too, perished in the flames. But, as the last lines of *Atlakvioa* remind us, 'She caused the death of three kings of a nation, bright lady, before she died': she was needed by poets for other deeds.

The nature and background of the Fulani *hoddu* have been characterized brilliantly by Christiane Seydou in her Introductions to her two editions, and in articles comparing various West Sub-Sahara traditions of heroic poetry.³ Thus I shall only say here that the poems⁴ performed to the *hoddu*-lute and clustered about such heroes as Silâmaka and Ham-Bodêdio present examples of a cult of honour as absolute as that of the Serbo-Croat and Germanic heroic songs, a cult summed up in the noun *pulâku* 'behaviour fitting for, nay, demanded of a Fula gentleman'. Inspired by their individually nuanced ideals of *pulâku*, the heroes are very touchy. They mill round in the poems like battleships of sovereign powers in confined waters during a crisis: one ambiguous manoeuvre and the whole thing will blow up. The haughty Ham-Bodêdio, for example, cannot be offered the usual greeting because it refers to 'peace' — who would dare to imply that anything but peace was possible for miles around Ham-Bodêdio? On the other hand, Ham-Bodêdio is no fool: aware of the danger that pulses from him in all directions, he is sensitive to other heroes' danger and steers a careful course. At times he controls his breathing so hard that a blood-drop will spurt from him. Other heroes are similarly circumspect and self-contained, notably Silâmaka, who foresees and accepts his own death with much the same detachment as Gunnar. However, in contrast to the poets of the Germanic and Serbo-Croat traditions, the Fulani bards contrive for great heroes to die very seldom, thanks (as in the Homeric and North Asiatic traditions) to supernatural intervention, here in the form of talismans.

A narrative sequence forms the life of the noble Silâmaka and his unfree double Pullôri — thus the widespread sort of 'biographical epic' with some reason downgraded by Aristotle — exists in the longer version of the celebrated Tingiji, and in several shorter versions. For an outsider, at least, Tingiji's version is somewhat marred by his comments on things that would be missed only by the stupidest of his listeners — or is he instructing the ethnographers? More important here, Tingiji fails to use the tremendous 'epic moment' at the beginning, well exploited in shorter versions, when the infant Silâmaka stares at the

³ Seydou's editions of *hoddu* are: *Silâmaka et Poullôri, Classiques africains*, 13, Paris, 1972 and *La geste de Ham-Bodêdio ou Hama le Rouge, Classiques africains*, 18, Paris, 1976. See also her 'A few reflections on narrative structures of epic texts: a case example of Bambara and Fulani epics' (*Research in African literatures*, 14, 1983, No. 3, pp. 312-31).

⁴ Though *hoddu* are 'poems' to the comparativist, they do not rank as such in Fula poetics, but rather as stylized prose narratives borne on the music of the *hoddu*, as Seydou is careful to point out.

Bambara tribute-collector with unflinching gaze though an ox-fly is boring into his forehead till it drops gorged with blood, a portent which the Bambara expounds to his lord at home with the laconic: 'There was a bush on the path, barely shooting, which, once grown, will block the way!' On the other hand, the shorter versions at times narrate so scantily that one is grateful for Tingiji's fulness. Tingiji's 'Silâmaka and Pullôri' is judged here to be 'a shorter biographical epic'. Yet the shorter versions cannot be styled 'lays', for biographical heroic poems and heroic lays are two different forms. As Aristotle so clearly saw, the life of a hero cannot provide an integrated action but only a number of such, and if this does not totally disqualify a life as a subject for epic treatment, it certainly disqualifies it as a subject for a lay. Even if it were argued that the integrating factor in Silâmaka's life from infancy to the grave is his superb assertion of *pulâku*, or more boldly, that Silâmaka's life is but a foil to the life of his 'black' alter ego Pullâri, who finally surpasses him, it is still a life, Pullôri's, and bursts the mould of the lay.

I turn, then to a *hoddu* of heroic content presenting a highly integrated action spread through a day and with a cauda lasting a year. It was recorded from Idrissa Batâl in 1970, and is given the title 'Ham-Bodêdio and Hama Alasseini Gâkoi' in Seydou's Table des Matières. A title expressing the integrating factor of this *hoddu* would be 'Lobburu tests her husband Hama Alasseini's manhood'. After the opening fanfare of Ham-Bodêdio's *noddol* or Motto set to a tune, the bare plot runs thus:

Alasseini Gâkoi has not returned from a visit away before griots and go-betweens have sown seeds of discord between him and his wife, Lobburu, by telling her that all other Fulani ladies of her station drink the Milk of Dun Cows. Thus Lobburu sulks when Alasseini returns and kicks him out of bed repeatedly when his Five Rogues go wandering. Drawing his dagger, the hero forces Lobburu to explain her strange behaviour. He then swears that from the moment he ceases to be a lousy corpse she shall drink the Milk, and is received to favour. Next morning, Alasseini rides to the lands of the owner of the Dun Cows, the formidable Ham-Bodêdio, with whose Motto this poem ironically begins. Alasseini resents the insuperable difficulty of extending the usual greeting to Ham-Bodêdio and huffs off to the pastures. There he is challenged by the herdsmen, most of whom he kills. Reporting to Ham-Bodêdio, a survivor gets his throat cut: 'A Fula who renounces dying among the Cows mars his own death!' utters Ham-Bodêdio. Meanwhile, Alasseini has been slaying herdsmen of higher calibre. He commands his men to drive the Cows to his own territories — then stops in his tracks! He had forgotten that Lobburu declines to drink milk from females humiliated by herdsmen blowing into their vulvas when there are no

calves to induce the flow!⁵ And the Calves are in the shadow of Ham-Bodêdio! Like the hero he is, Alasseini makes for Gundaka forthwith. Ham-Bodêdio learns of this, and with the boast 'There is no Fula who can make me drink *godia-godie* (a vegetable 'milk')!', he allows his son to confront Alasseini. But the young man is over-awed and goes back to tell his father that he will drink *godia-godie* for all that, at which news Ham-Bodêdio holds his breath so hard that droplets of blood fall from him. Through a series of elegant topoi — Rage, Arming, Mounting — Ham-Bodêdio rides out to the tamarinds on which he would fain hang Alasseini. Says Hama Alasseini Gâkoi to Ham-Bodêdio: 'Namesake, have you brought the gold and silver draughtsmen?' Ham-Bodêdio has indeed had the wit to do so. They play. Alasseini wins and mocks his opponent. He also airs Lobburu's crotchet about the Cows. Ham-Bodêdio then takes him to the compound, where a magical trial of strength leaves their weapons smashed, with no advantage to Ham-Bodêdio, who then displays, strikes and misses with his magical fetter Kati. Alasseini retrieves Kati and with his second blow has put Ham-Bodêdio ignominiously to flight — falsifying the latter's opening Motto and lapidary saying on defending the Cows. Alasseini now goes to the Calves, but chivalrously leaves Twelve lest the ladies of Gundaka drink water — or *godia-godie*! The Cows remain with Alasseini for a year, during which time the new-born are added to the herd. All these months Lobburu has neither drunk of the Milk nor eaten of the Butter. One day she tells her husband that it is high time the Cows were returned to Gundaka. 'I only wished to know if I had a man worthy of the name.' The herd is sent back with the increase. Ham-Bodêdio has sent an expedition against Alasseini to claim the debt, but his diplomats are bribed by Alasseini's people into convincing him that after flattening the town of Horé Uendu, the region comes to an end. They could only ever find themselves in Alasseini's land if Ham-Bodêdio had first slain him.

This narrative yields a first-class heroic plot over twelve scenes, counting the Prologue (the Motto) and the Epilogue (the Frustration of Ham-Bodêdio's Vengeance), appreciably more than in a Germanic lay or a normal Serbo-Croat heroic song. Visual-peaks-cum-gesture are: a high early peak where the Hero is kicked out of bed by his wife (scene 2); a lowish peak with higher implications where the herdsman's throat is cut to illustrate the saying on marring one's death by deserting the cows (soon to be falsified by its utterer) (scenes 5 and 9); the intensified peak where Alasseini Gâkoi stops in mid-field, remembering the Calves, which brings him within Ham-Bodêdio's danger (scene 6); Ham-Bodêdio's boast about not drinking *godia-godie*, then the bloody signs of his catching his breath (scene 7), linked in a sense humiliating for Ham-Bodêdio with Alasseini's allowance of Calves lest the former's ladies

⁵ The bovine therapy of the Fula was reported for the Scyths and Herodotus in the *Histories* of the beginning of Book Four. It is otherwise known as *Kuhblasen*.

drink *godia-godie* (scene 10); the final peak, only seemingly an anticlimax, with no visual accentuation, where Lobburu gives an offhand feminine explanation why so many dangers had to be gone through. It expresses Lobburu's calm satisfaction with her heroic husband and stands in fitting contrast to the violent initial peak at which she kicked him out of bed. It leaves Alasseini's decision to go for the Calves — fully motivated by a feminist fad of Lobburu's — to dominate at the post-middle position somewhat in the style of the Germanic lays analysed above. There are thus ten scenes celebrating the *pulâku* of Hama Alasseini Gakoi at the cost of Ham-Bodêdio, enframed between the opening, trumpeting Ham-Bodêdio and his rescue by friend and foe at the end.

I would set this remarkable *hoddu* on the frontiers of 'lay' and 'shorter epic' and dare to assert that this indeterminedness, to an aprioristic outside view, inheres in the genre. *Here is a tradition where one does not need to cudgel one's brains as to how 'the lay' achieved 'epic form': in hoddu a gifted bard makes the transition, if transition it be, as he pleases.*

This is nowhere more clearly seen than in Seydou's 'The first episode', entitled in the Index 'The three fears of Ham-Bodêdio; the invention of Saigalâré, Ham-Bodêdio and Bonguel', which I rate as 'shorter epic', and an excellent one. 'The first episode' (which should not be misnamed 'Saigalâré') is too long to analyse here in detail. Suffice to say, it is 1264 lines long, and is held together by the continuous theme of 'Saigâlaré', Ham-Bodêdio's musico-verbal Motto or *noddol*, evocative of his heroic essence, his personal variant of *pulâku*. First, Ham-Bodêdio is shown criticizing Mottos offered by a griot, then it is said that when Ham-Bodêdio dies, Saigalâré will be sold cheap on the market. Then in Catalogue-form, Ham-Bodêdio narrates three occasions when he knew fear. Then comes a wondrous story of how this bard — the singer of this *hoddu*! — obtained Saigalâré from a jin and the terrible story of how Ham-Bodêdio was forced by his, Ham-Bodêdio's, uttered word to lance his dear wife Fâdia through both thighs in lieu of his bard, whom she had wheedled into divulging Saigalâré! Finally, there comes the clash with the powerful club-footed Bonguel at a tavern frequented by the burly Heroes, into which the embittered Fâdia goads her men with the taunt: 'Ham-Bodêdio will never present himself in the market at Kuna. Stay here in our Kunari ... and drink fruit juice — you will fancy you are drunk and come and lance me!' The poem ends soundly on 'Saigalâré'.

The three Fula poems touched on here fall square within the native genre of *hoddu*. It is only we who see one as a short 'biographical epic', another as a 'longer lay', and the third as a 'shorter epic'. I think this should give theorists food for thought.

Like the Fula poems, the Serbo-Croat heroic songs seem to straddle the dividing-line between two meta-genres, in this case those of 'heroic

ballad' and 'heroic lay'. With reference to the Serbo-Croat heroic song, W. J. Entwistle wrote engagingly: 'It is of ballad simplicity, but of epic seriousness', adding that it is hard for critics to decide to which branch these songs belong. Here I shall confine myself to those songs which transcend balladry.

The Germanic lay and the Serbo-Croat heroic song are of roughly comparable average length, whereas the Fula *hoddu* tends to be longer, ranging up to shorter epic length. Thus it is not surprising that there are marked initial peaks in the Serbo-Croat as in the Germanic poems. But since there is no obligatory tragic dénouement there tend to be stronger final peaks, coupled with weaker middles.

I will begin not with a Kosovo song but with one of Marko, since it suggests intensified effort on the singer's part to make his final peak of equivalent or superior impact to that of his terrific opening. 'Prince Marko knows his Father's Sword' opens with one of the most striking scenes in all heroic poetry, a scene of at once natural and surrealist intensity. A Turkish maiden is washing linen in the clear Maritsa before dawn. After dawn, the river grows turbid, it reddens with blood, brings horses, the caps of warriors ... later, wounded warriors in person ... Among them is Marko's father, whom the maiden hauls ashore with her linen. The Maritsa flows from the recent past into the present. The superlative quality of this opening is underscored by the weak use of this motif in the middle of 'Musić Stevan'. Here another maiden, drawing water from the Sitnitsa, had found the river already in flood and awash with steeds and heroes. She speaks of this event only in retrospect, the dramatic change in the river is lost. In the song of Marko, the maiden's brother kills the rescued prince for his sword and is cursed by her. Enrolled for military service, the Turk takes the sword to court, where it is passed from hand to hand admiringly. Marko in turn inspects it, draws the blade, and knows it for his father's. He then kills the Turk, fulfilling the sister's curse. We are now on a highish plateau, for it is no light matter to kill a soldier of the Sultan near the Presence. The singer proceeds to boost his ending with a succession of gestures by Marko. Marko ignores the Sultan's summons and drinks wine. He goes armed with his mace to court, sits with his boots on the carpet — the prayer-mat? — and chivvies the Sultan against a buttress. In a typical moment of pathos and burlesque, the Sultan gropes in his pocket and dispenses a hundred ducats for Marko. Due gravity is restored by Marko's explanation that he had recognized his father's sword and, had it been seen in the Sultan's own right hand, Marko would have had to settle with him. The singer has balanced the superb opening by rocking the Imperial Throne. And as so often in the Serbo-Croat heroic songs, he has demonstrated as in a theorem the absolute nature of a hero's obligations.

Another song with strong first and last peaks is 'Prince Lazar's Wedding'. The spilling of wine past the brim by Butler Lazar as he

pours for Tsar Stefan is matched at the end by the brimming-over of tears wrung from old Jug-Bogdan when he reads from the Sacred Books that he must bestow his daughter on Lazar as future Tsar. And there is a more pronounced dominance here of the end over the beginning in that, if the Tsar's wine is costly, an old warrior's tears are more so by far. This major final peak follows hard on a lesser peak at which the Jugović brothers were drawing their swords to slay the Tsar in his own palace for saying that their sister should be given to a man of lower rank. When an ending overtops a beginning I regard it as perfect in an heroic song.

In the 'Death of the Mother of the Jugovići', the initial and final peaks are both surrealist. The Mother of the Jugovići acquires falcon's eyes and swan's wings and flies to Kosovo. Despite her mounting tale of woe as the song progresses, her heart remains hard, her eyes dry. This, even when a pair of gory ravens drop a severed hand with a gold ring on her lap. She gazes at the Hand dry-eyed as she turns it over and over — one feels it has already become a holy relic — until the wife of her favourite son tells her it is Damian's. That which had blossomed on her lap has been plucked upon Kosovo! Her heart breaks with sorrow for her Dead, for her Nine Sons and their Father!

As already noted, it is typical of the Serbo-Croat heroic songs to demonstrate theorems of *junaštvo* much as the Fula *hoddu* demonstrate theorems of *pulâku*. For instance, 'Prince Marko and Ljutica Bogdan' demonstrates the theorem that one must never go back on a word plighted to battle-comrades. When Marko, Relja and Miloš pass Bogdan's vineyard, Marko warns the others not to take the grapes. He had done so once and found Bogdan so formidable that he had run away. Thus when the others ignore his warning and are challenged by Bogdan and his men, Marko is tempted to run away again. But, remembering his oath to his comrades, he stands his ground and glares at Bogdan so fiercely that Bogdan not only does not attack but proposes an exchange of prisoners and a chat over a drink. 'May you never be so afraid as I was of you!' says Bogdan. Similarly, in 'Tsar Lazar and Tsaritsa Milica' the duty to go to Kosovo is *proved* to be sublime and inescapable, not only because not one of the Jugovići stays behind at the Tsar's behest to sponsor their kinswoman the Tsaritsa, but also — and definitively — because the servitor Goluban fails to do so.

With its quite unusual length of 814 lines 'Banović Strahinja' does not need a very high peak to start from. All the more does it need a powerful end to draw it all together. The meaning and function of its ending, however, have been the subject of much debate, with one eminent authority suggesting that the singer Milija had plied himself too generously with his usual source of inspiration for him to know what he was singing at the end. Drinking with his in-laws the Jugovići, Strahinja learns by ballad penny-post of his total ruin, with his mother humiliated and his wife — his host's daughter — abducted by a Turk. The Jugovići

deny him their aid, so off he rides alone to Kosovo, to which this song is tenuously attached. On the battlefield, as though no momentous battle were imminent, Strahinja finds a lone dervish drinking in his tent, a former prisoner of his whom he had treated with generosity. The dervish promises he will not betray Strahinja's presence to the Turks. Strahinja then finds his wife in the pavilion of her captor, who suddenly appears. In the ensuing duel all weapons are shattered. From a wrestling-lock Strahinja bids his wife take a broken sword and finish off the man she loves the less. She deals Strahinja a heavy blow, but he fights free after biting through his adversary's throat. He rides back to the Jugovići with his wife, leaving Kosovo to lump it. When he tells the Jugovići of their woman's unfaithfulness they out with their swords in Jugović fashion to make an end of her, but Strahinja stays them with the hollow line: 'If they are so brave, why don't they go to Kosovo?' He can finish her off himself. Instead (so it seems) he will finish their relationship and *drink wine alone*. He will moreover make a bow to his wife.⁶

Having no reputation to lose in Serbo-Croat studies, I will suggest from the angle of vision of the present enquiry that three ingredients of the ending are pretty obvious. The first is Strahinja's confrontation of the Jugovići with their utter inadequacy as an heroic clan, man and woman alike. The second is an assertion that the men are even worse than their daughter and sister — she at least knew where she stood in a crisis, for whereas they declined to draw sword to succour their relation, she used the best weapon to hand in the cause of the man she loved. The third ingredient must be — else the encounter with the dervish was in vain — that Strahinja wished to demonstrate to the honour-thumping Jugovići that a ruined man — a man doomed to drink wine alone — may still be capable of a generous act and pardon the unpardonable. If all this is allowable, then the ending of 'Banović Strahinja' is truly inspired and more than makes up for some defects occasioned by a wish to sing a long song and foist it upon Kosovo.

The foregoing is of too tentative a nature to warrant any 'conclusions', but it is hoped that enough has been said to encourage further enquiry in this direction. It is also hoped that other traditions will come to light which it would be fruitful to link with the three tested above.

⁶ Line 812 of *Banović Strahinja* is rendered by M. Braun as 'Meinem Weib habe ich das Leben geschenkt!' (*Das Serbokroatische Heldenlied*, Göttingen, 1961, p. 201); by N. Kravtsov as 'A svoey ya lyube poklonyusya' (*Serbskiy ėpos*, Moscow-Leningrad, 1933, p. 282); by M. A. Zenkevich as 'No svoey zhene poklon otvesil' (N. Kravtsov, M. A. Zenkevich (eds), *Serbskiy ėpos*, I, Moscow, 1960, p. 106).

Chapter Eleven

Parallelism in South Slav and Turkic epic poetry: towards a poetics of formulaic diction

KARL REICHL

When Johann Gottfried Herder published Goethe's poetic translation of the 'Hasanaginica' in his *Stimmen der Völker in Liedern* (1778, Part I), he inaugurated a period of keen interest in Serbo-Croat popular poetry in Germany. This period reached its culmination with Vuk Karadžić's publication of his *Narodne Srpske Pjesme* in three volumes in Leipzig (1824) and the various contemporary German translations of the poetry collected by him, most notably the translations by Therese von Jakob (Talvj). For Goethe, as for Herder, the study of Serbo-Croat popular poetry was part of a larger programme 'of appreciating poetic talent in all its manifestations and of recognizing it as an integral part of human history'.¹

This study of popular poetry entailed an appreciation of folk poetry as 'true poetry' (*wahre Poesie* in Goethe's words). Herder pointed to the stylistic peculiarities of oral poetry in his essay on Ossian and the songs of ancient peoples (1773) and stressed their artistic quality. One of the characteristics he underlined was 'rhythmical symmetry', the patterning of poetry into symmetrical units, as exemplified by the parallelistic structures of the Peruvian song he quoted — or of the 'Hasanaginica' and the other Serbo-Croat poems he edited in translation.²

The emphasis on the formulaic nature of Serbo-Croat oral poetry, in particular epic poetry, today, 200 years later, has shed light on yet another aspect of the art of the oral singer. As Albert Lord has pointed out: 'The poetic grammar of oral epic is and must be based on the formula.'³ Clearly, technique and poetics interlock in the making of an oral epic poem; it is with the latter, more precisely Herder's *Symmetrie des Rhythmus*, that this chapter is concerned.

Herder had already recognized that 'rhythmical symmetry' is a universal phenomenon; the same is true of parallelism, one of the main types of rhythmical patterning. In his study of the Old Portuguese

¹ Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Schriften zur Literatur. Zweiter Teil*, dtv Gesamtausgabe, XXXII, Munich, 1962, p. 87.

² Johann Gottfried Herder, *Sämtliche Werke*, V, Berlin, 1891, p. 171.

³ Albert Bates Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, Cambridge, MA, 1960, p. 65.

cantigas de amigo Eugenio Asensio compares parallelism in poetry to 'an enormous tree whose vigorous branches have spread over a great part of the earth'. Galician-Portuguese love poetry is according to Asensio only a small slip of this tree or, changing the metaphor, only a 'thin voice in a cosmic concert'.⁴ The task of studying the full score of this *concierto cosmico* is forbidding; all that can be done here is to follow the melodic line of a few individual parts, with only occasional glances at other voices and no more than tentative remarks about the underlying harmony.

Parallelism in poetry is based on identity. Two (or more) lines are parallel if they are identical on at least one level of linguistic structure. The beginning of the Altai epic *Kögütey* can serve as an example:

Yüs uçarlu qara tayganiñ,
yüs qöldu kök talaydiñ,
ayañ bolyon yaqazında,
arğan sūniñ yaradında,
kök buqanı minip yortqon
Kögütey öbögön yurtap yattı.

In the black taiga with the hundred waterfalls,
on the blue sea with the hundred cliffs,
on the mountain pasture,
on the bank of the mineral spring,
riding on a blue buffalo,
lived old Kögütey.⁵

In the first two lines identity is, on the phonological level, restricted to the numeral *yüs* 'hundred'. On the morphological level two suffixes are identical (though standing in allomorphic variation): the derivational suffix *-lu* 'having' (*uçar-lu/ qöl-du*), and the genitive morpheme *-niñ* (*tayga-niñ/ talay-diñ*). It is, however, only on the syntactical level that the two lines are fully identical; both can be analysed as noun phrases with a nominal head in the genitive and a sequence of three modifiers: numeral + attributive adjective 1 (= noun + *-lu*) = attributive adjective 2:

Yüs	uçar-lu	qara	tayga-niñ
hundred +	waterfall-having +	black +	of-the-taiga
yüs	qöl-du	kök	talay-diñ
hundred +	cliff-having+	blue +	of-the-sea

⁴ Eugenio Asensio, *Poética y Realidad en el Cancionero Peninsular de la Edad Media*, 2nd edn, Madrid, 1970, p. 70.

⁵ S. S. Surazakov (ed.), *Altay batırlar*, I, Gorno-Altai, 1958, p. 86. The transcription of Turkic texts follows throughout this chapter common Turcological practice as codified in A. von Gabain, *Alttürkische Grammatik*, 3rd edn, Wiesbaden, 1974. Unless indicated otherwise, all translations are my own.

Syntactic identity is enhanced by semantic similarity and contrast. *Qara*, 'black', and *kök*, 'blue', are similar in denoting colours, but different as to the colours they denote; *uçar*, 'waterfall', and *qöl*, 'cliff', 'steep coast', are similar in being both connected to steepness and, in the given context, to water, while *tayga*, 'taiga', and *talay*, 'sea', are the two opposites and complementaries of our earth, land and water.

The similarities and contrasts built up in the first two lines are carried over into the following lines. In lines 3 and 4 we find again morpho-syntactic identity, as well as semantic similarity. *Yaqa* and *yarat*, both with the basic meaning 'rim', occur in identical constructions: they are nouns used as postpositions in the locative case (-*da*), with a connecting possessive suffix (-*ï(n)-*). On the semantic level *ayan*, 'mountain pasture', and *arğan sū*, 'mineral spring', take up the land/water-contrast of the first two lines.

This interplay of identity and contrast on the expression and content plane of language is typical of parallelistic verse in general and it has led, according to the options taken, to various classifications and sub-classifications of parallelistic verse. On the basis of Bishop Robert Lowth's lectures on Hebrew verse (1753) two basic types of *parallelismus membrorum* are customarily distinguished, synonymous parallelism and antithetic parallelism.⁶ Synonymous parallelism is the most frequent kind of parallelism in the Old Portuguese *cantigas de amigo*. Asensio distinguishes three sub-types, of which the first is by far the most common: 'the repetition of a verse-line and its rhythmical movement, where only the end is varied by the replacement of the rhyming word by a synonym.'⁷ This can be illustrated by a short poem by Martim Codax from the thirteenth century:

Ondas do mar de Vigo,
se vistes meu amigo?
e, ai Deus! se verrá cedo?

Waves of the sea near Vigo,
have you seen my friend?
O God, will he come soon?

Ondas do mar levado,
se vistes meu amado?
e, ai Deus! se verrá cedo?

Waves of the high sea,
have you seen my lover?
O God, will he come soon?

Se vistes meu amigo,
o por que eu sospiro?
e, ai Deus! se verrá cedo?

Have you seen my friend,
for whom I sigh?
O God, will he come soon?

⁶ Robert Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, 2 vols, London, 1787 (reprinted Hildesheim, 1969). Lowth recognizes a third type of parallelism — synthetic or constructive parallelism — defined as purely syntactic parallelism (cf. *Lectures*, II, pp. 35-53). On biblical parallelism see also James L. Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and its History*, New Haven, 1981, pp. 1-58.

⁷ Asensio, op. cit., p. 78. The following example is cited from S. Pellegrini (ed.), *Auswahl altportugiesischer Lieder*, Halle, 1928, p. 37.

Se vistes meu amado,
por que ei gram cuidado?
e, ai Deus! se verrá cedo?

Have you seen my lover,
because of whom I suffer?
O God, will he come soon?

There is an almost static quality about this poem, enhanced by the economy of expression. Semantically, virtually nothing is added after the first stanza; the same words and concepts are used again and again, with only slight and strongly patterned variations.

Antithetic parallelism or, preferably, analogous parallelism is built on similarity and contrast, ranging from near-synonymy to antithesis. Wolfgang Steinitz based his detailed study of parallelism in Finnish oral poetry on this dichotomy of synonymous and analogous parallelism. As to the latter, he distinguishes six sub-types: antithetic parallelism (in the narrow sense), enumerative parallelism, varying parallelism, chain parallelism and the parallelism of groups of verse-lines. His classification was taken over by N. Poppe in his analysis of parallelistic verse in Mongolian epic poetry, and it can also be applied to Turkic and South Slav epic poetry.⁸

The most sophisticated use of parallelism in poetry is perhaps found in Chinese lyric poetry. The variety of Chinese parallelistic verse has been tabulated as early as the ninth century by the Japanese Buddhist monk Kūkai (Kōbō Daishi), who differentiated between no less than twenty-nine types.⁹ It is important to realize that parallelism is not confined to oral poetry, epic or lyrical, but is also found in the work of literate poets; it is not necessarily a mark of primitive naïveté, it can also be a sign of self-conscious artistry. In Persian poetry, for instance, there is a poetic device, termed *tarsîc* 'adornment', which consists in the word-for-word correspondence between two lines, such that for every word in one line there is a matching word in the other line, with both the same rhyme and the same syllabic structure.¹⁰

Nevertheless, it is in oral literatures that parallelism is most widely spread. 'Grammatical parallelism,' writes Roman Jakobson in his study of parallelism in Russian oral poetry, 'belongs to the poetic canon of numerous folk patterns.'¹¹ In the same article, Jakobson briefly touches on Turkic parallelistic verse and remarks that an 'intensive structural

⁸ Wolfgang Steinitz, *Der Parallelismus in der finnisch-karelischen Volksdichtung, untersucht an den Liedern des karelischen Sängers Arhippa Perttunen*, Helsinki, 1934 [FF Communications, CXV]; Nicholas Poppe, 'Der Parallelismus in der epischen Dichtung der Mongolen' (*Ural-Altaische Jahrbücher*, XXX, 1958, pp. 195-228).

⁹ J. R. Hightower, 'Some Characteristics of Parallel Prose', in S. Egerod, E. Glahn (eds), *Studia Serica Bernhard Karlgren Dedicata*, Copenhagen, 1959, pp. 60-91.

¹⁰ Annemarie Schimmel, *Stern und Blume: Die Bilderwelt der persischen Poesie*, Wiesbaden, 1984, pp. 38-39.

¹¹ Roman Jakobson, 'Grammatical Parallelism and its Russian Facet' (*Language*, XL, 1966, p. 403). On parallelism in oral poetry, cf. Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Poetry: its Nature, Significance and Social Context*, Cambridge, 1977, pp. 98-102.

analysis of parallelism as it functions in the oral tradition of single Turkic peoples is a pressing linguistic task.’¹² This chapter can, of course, not pretend to give such an analysis, but it is hoped that at least some of the most characteristic forms and uses of parallelism in epic poetry in general and in Turkic oral epics in particular will emerge when compared to parallelism as found in South Slav epic poetry. For reasons of space the subject cannot be treated fully here; the discussion of South Slav epic poetry will therefore have to be confined on the whole to a fairly small set of examples from Serbo-Croat heroic songs. It should be borne in mind, however, that parallelism is a stylistic trait also of other oral poetry of the Balkans, found in Macedonian folk lyrics as well as in Romanian ballads, in Italo-Albanian heroic lays as well as in Greek oral poetry.¹³

As Viktor Zhirmunsky, following the Polish Turcologist Tadeusz Kowalski, has shown, the basis of Turkic parallelism is metre and syntax.¹⁴ Parallelistic structures are first found in the eighth-century runic stone inscriptions of the Orkhon valley in Mongolia, in a kind of rhythmical prose aimed at conciseness and memorability.¹⁵ The earliest specimens of Turkic heroic epic poetry have come down to us in the eleventh-century *Divān luyat at-turk* by Mahmūd of Kashgar. Many stylistic and metric characteristics of later Turkic oral poetry can already be found in the extracts Mahmūd quotes. Thus one of the battle poems has the following description of the hero’s flight on his horse:

İqilaçim ärik boldi,	My courser became lively,
ärik bolıu yäru kördi,	it saw the place to be lively in,
bulit örüb kök örtüldi,	a cloud rose up, the sky became dark,
tuman törüb tolı yađdı.	a mist arose, a hailstorm broke out. ¹⁶

This poem has lines of eight syllables, with a caesura after the fourth syllable. This is the epic metre *par excellence* of Turkic oral poetry, in particular in Central Asia (Kirghiz, Kazakh, Karakalpak, Altai and

¹² Jakobson, op. cit., p. 405.

¹³ On the Macedonian folk lyrics see H. Peukert, *Serbokroatische und makedonische Volkslyrik: Gestaltuntersuchungen*, Berlin, 1961, pp. 146-58; on the Romanian ballads see A. Fochi, *Estetica Oralității*, Bucharest, 1980, pp. 222-25; on the Italo-Albanian heroic lays see Alois Schmaus, ‘Die albanische Volksepik’, in *Gesammelte slavistische und balkanologische Abhandlungen*, II, Munich, 1971-79, pp. 98-99; on Greek oral poetry see Roderick Beaton, *Folk Poetry of Modern Greece*, Cambridge, 1980, pp. 44-55.

¹⁴ Viktor Zhirmunsky, ‘Rhythmico-Syntactic Parallelism as the Basis of Old Turkic Folk Epic Verse’, in *Selected Writings: Linguistics, Poetics*, Moscow, 1985, pp. 320-52 (first published in 1964).

¹⁵ I. V. Stebleva, *Poetika drevnetyurkskoi literatury i ee transformatsiya v ranneklassicheskiy period*, Moscow, 1976, pp. 101-02.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 205.

others).¹⁷ The parallelism of lines 3 and 4 is one of content as well as expression. Syntactically each line consists of a gerundival construction (suffix *-(ü)b*) and a construction with a finite verb in the past (suffix *-di*), giving the sequence noun + verb (gerund) + noun + verb (past):

bulit	ör-üb	kök	ört-ül-di
cloud +	rise-GER +	sky +	cover-PASSIVE-PAST
tuman	törüb	toli	yağ-di
mist +	rise-GER +	hail +	rain-PAST

Phonologically *örüb* is echoed by *törüb*, while semantically all four phrases are related, the closest semantic parallel existing, of course, between the rising cloud and the rising mist.

The syntactic structure of the Turkic languages, with traits such as a rigorous word-order (the verb always coming at the end of the sentence and the modifying element always preceding its head) and the preference for gerundival and participial constructions, encourages parallelism. In Turkic oral poetry parallelism is also intimately linked to formulaic diction. The formulaic beginning of an epic poem, giving the setting of the action in time and place — what V. Miller termed *geograficheskiy* and *khronologicheskiy zachin* in relation to the Russian *byliny*¹⁸ — is frequently in the form of parallel locative constructions (suffix *-da*), as for instance in the Karakalpak epic *Qirïq Qiz* (Forty Maidens):

Burïnyï ötken zamanda,	In the days of old,
sol zamanniñ qädiminde,	in the days of yore,
Qaraqalpaq xalqında,	among the Karakalpak,
ata žurti Turkstanda,	in the homeland of Turkestan,
Sarkop degen qalada,	in a town called Sarkop,
az Noğayli elatında ...	in the small Nogay-tribe ¹⁹

This kind of parallelism is not restricted to passages in verse; it is also found in the rhymed prose parts of the Uzbek *dāstāns* (heroic and romance-like epic narratives in a mixture of verse and prose). The epic poems of the *Goroγli*-cycle, for instance, begin with a similar formulaic *zachin* in rhymed prose.²⁰ Parallelism is also a feature of the formulaic

¹⁷ The seven- or eight-syllable line represents the more archaic metre of Turkic epic poetry. There is also an eleven- or twelve-syllable line, employed in lyrical love epics. Cf. Zhirmunsky, *op. cit.* and P.N. Boratav, 'L'Épopée et la "Hikāye"', in J. Deny *et al.* (eds), *Philologiae Turcicae Fundamenta*, II, Wiesbaden, 1959-64, pp. 11-14.

¹⁸ V. Miller, *Ocherki russkoi narodnoi slovesnosti: Byliny*, I, Moscow, 1897-1923, pp. 38-49.

¹⁹ Q. Maqsetov, N. Zhapaqov, T. Niyetullaev (eds), *Qirïq Qiz*, Nukus, 1980, p. 42.

²⁰ Karl Reichl (trans.), *Rawšan: Ein usbekisches mündliches Epos*, Wiesbaden,

beginning of the Serbo-Croat oral epic, as well as of the Bulgarian epic poems, in particular antithetic parallelism, such as in the celebrated 'Hasanaginica'.²¹ Although the 'Slavonic antithesis' is by no means confined to Slav poetry (it is also found in Old English, Old Irish and Finnish), it is not a common device of Turkic epic poetry.

A Turkic epic might also begin with some maxim or gnomic verses, arranged in parallelistic fashion, such as in the Kirghiz *Kökötöydün aşı* (The Memorial Feast for Kökötöy Khan) from the *Manas*-cycle:

Altın iyerniñ kaşı eken:
ata jurtnuñ başı eken.
kümüš iyerniñ kaşı eken:
tün tüškön kalıñ köp Nogay jurtnuñ başı eken.

A golden saddle has its pommel:
a people has its chieftain.
A silver saddle has its pommel:
the Nogay teeming as shadows at nightfall have their chieftain.²²

Gnomic verses often introduce verse-passages or individual stanzas (in the case of stanzaic verse-passages), particularly in the epics of those traditions in which the lyrical element is prominent, such as in the Uzbek *dāstāns*:

Kuygan alwān-alwān sozlar,
ayrilgan bir-birin izlar ... (*Rawšan*)

Those burning with love speak many words,
those separated seek one another ...²³

In many cases such lines are only loosely (if at all) connected to the context in which they occur. They frequently contain a nature image and are evocative rather than descriptive. A number of battle-scenes in the Kazakh epic *Qoblandi batır*, for instance, are interspersed with the following lines:

1985, pp. 35-37 [*Asiatische Forschungen*, XCIII].

²¹ On antithetic parallelism see E. Weiher, *Der negative Vergleich in der russischen Volkspoesie*, Munich, 1972 [*Forum Slavicum*, XXXV]; Felix J. Oinas, 'Negative Parallelism in Karelian-Finnish Folklore', *Studia Fennica*, XX, 1976, pp. 222-29.

²² A. T. Hatto (ed., trans.), *The Memorial Feast for Kökötöy-Khan (Kökötöydün Aşı): A Kirghiz Epic Poem*, Oxford, 1977, pp. 2-3 [*London Oriental Series*, XXXIII]. On parallelism in maxims and proverbs see also Lauri Harvilahti, 'Zwei Fliegen mit einer Klappe: zum Parallelismus der Sprichwörter' (*Finnisch-Ugrische Forschungen*, XLVIII, 1987, pp. 27-38).

²³ H. Zarif (ed.), *Tarğimai Hāl, Rawšan, Qunduz bilan Yulduz*, Tashkent, 1971, p. 106.

Arqada bar bōrikōz,
 žaqšīda γoy tāwir söz ...

On the steppe there is a *bōrikōz* [a kind of plant],
 in a good man there are good words ... ²⁴

The closest parallel to this use of lyric verse in epic poetry is probably afforded by the epic traditions of the Malayo-Polynesian world. G.W.J. Drewes remarks that:

in Achehnese poetic style parallelism, i.e. the repetition of a phrase in different words, either in the same line or in the next, is cherished far above terseness. It is furthermore supplemented by an apposite use of proverbs, sayings, and *pantuns* ...

Similar observations can be made about Minangkabau narrative poetry.²⁵

In Turkic epic poetry there are also short verse-passages (of normally two or three lines) which likewise contain an image, a simile or a metaphor, but which are directly related to the narrative, being descriptive either of the action or of the feelings of the protagonists. Typical are parallel lines such as the following from the Uzbek heroic epic *Alpāmiš* (both are formulaic):

(In a battle scene:)
 Mardlarī daryāday tāšdī,
 nāmardlarnīñ aqlī šāšdī.

The brave ones overflowed like a river,
 the cowardly ones were seized by confusion.

(Of one of the protagonists:)
 Bāydačilgan gulday bolīb,
 čamanda bulbulday bolīb ...

He became like a rose, opening in the garden,
 like a nightingale on the meadow ... ²⁶

The last example shows the close connection between parallelism as a stylistic trait and what A.N. Veselovskiy termed 'psychological parallelism'. Veselovskiy argued that parallelism originated in the comparison between a psychological state and the world of nature and he gave

²⁴ N.V. Kidaish-Pokrovskaya, O. A. Nurmagambetova (eds, trans), *Qoblandi batir*, Moscow, 1965, pp. 115, 117, 191, 200.

²⁵ G.W.J. Drewes (ed., trans.), *Hikajat Potjut Muhamat: an Achehnese Epic*, The Hague, 1979, p. 27 [*Bibliotheca Indonesica*, XIX]. Cf. also N. Phillips, *Sijobang: Sung Narrative Poetry of West Sumatra*, Cambridge, 1981, p. 9.

²⁶ H. Ālimğān, H. Zarif, T. Mirzaev (eds), *Alpāmiš*, Tashkent, 1979, pp. 174-75, 367.

numerous examples of parallelistic verse in lyrical poetry reflecting this correspondence between man and nature, ranging from Old Norse to Tatar, Bashkir and Chuvash.²⁷ Some Turkic lyrical genres, such as the Turkish *mâni* or the Altai *qoŋon*, are, just like the Malay *pantun*, based on parallelism.²⁸ A similar use of parallelism can be found in Serbo-Croat lyric poetry; Veselovskiy quotes among other examples the following lines:

Tavna noći, tavana ti si!
Nevjestice, bleđa ti si.

Dark night, you are dark!
Little bride, you are pale.²⁹

In Serbo-Croat epic poetry, on the other hand, parallelistic verse-lines are in general closely connected to the action of the poems, nature images being on the whole quite rare.³⁰ If we take a short epic song like 'Prince Marko and the Vila', we find that most parallelistic lines describe the action, emphasizing the consecution or at any rate order of the events:³¹

Vila leti po vr'u planine,
Šarac jezdi po sredi planine...

The vila flew over the mountain peak,
Šarac galloped through the mountains ... (ll.72-73)

Ode vila u Miroč planinu,
ode Marko s pobratimom svojim ...

The vila went to Mount Miroč,
Marko went away with his sworn brother ... (ll.110-11)

jedna ud'ri u grlo Miloša,
druga ud'ri u srce junačko.

One [arrow] hit Miloš in the throat,
the other pierced his brave heart. (ll.45-46)

ta jedno je Kraljeviću Marko,
a drugo je vojvoda Milošu;
naporedo jezde dobre konje,

²⁷ A. N. Veselovskiy, 'Psikhologicheskiiy parallelizm i ego formy v otrazheniyakh poeticheskogo stilya', in *Istoricheskaya poetika*, Leningrad, 1940, pp. 125-99.

²⁸ Cf. Tadeusz Kowalski, *Ze studjów nad formą poezji ludów tureckich. I*, Warsaw, 1921, pp. 140-42 [Prace Komisji orientalistycznej, V]; R. J. Wilkinson, R.O. Winstedt (eds), *Pantun Mělayu*, Singapore, 1914, pp. 3-22.

²⁹ Veselovskiy, op. cit., p. 138.

³⁰ N.I. Kravtsov, *Serbskokhorvatskiy epos*, Moscow, 1985, pp. 241-42.

³¹ Vuk Stefanović Karadžić, *Srpske narodne pjesme*, II, Belgrade, 1953-58, pp. 210-14.

naporedo nose koplja bojna ...

... one of them is Marko Kraljević,
the other is Duke Miloš;
next to one another trot the good horses,
next to one another they carry the war-lances ... (ll.3-6)

There are, however, also parallel lines of a more static nature, formulaic lines describing the hero's horse and weapons with their respective epithets:

i mojega vidovita Šarca,
i mojega šestopera zlatna!

... and my clear-sighted Šarac,
and my golden six-knobbed mace! (ll.26-27; cf. ll.120-21)

A similar picture emerges from the corresponding Romanian epic song 'Gruia, Novac and the Fairy'. We find repeated parallel lines marking the course of action:³²

Și de mînă o lua
Și la Gruia o ducea
Și din gură-așa striga...

And he takes her by the hand
and leads her to Gruia
and speaks thus ... (ll.88-90; cf. ll.133-36)

The hero's weapons are also enumerated as part of an oath:

Pe cuțit și pe băltac
Și pe dulce săbioară...

By knife and by axe
and by sweet sabre ... (ll.109-10; cf. ll.139-40)

But we also find parallelistic lines of a more evocative kind, as when the power of Gruia's singing is described by hyperbole:

Toți munții s-or legăna,
Lemnele s-or scutura ...

All the mountains tremble,
the trees lose their foliage ... (ll.14-15; cf. II, ll.34-35)

Parallelism and formulaic diction are intimately connected. Parallel lines function characteristically as formulas tending towards the cliché, especially when they are repeated *verbatim* in a *leitmotif*-like manner.

³² A.I. Amzulescu (ed.), *Cîntecul Epic Eroic*, Bucharest, 1981, pp. 267-69.

There are various grades of rigidity to be observed in the formulaic diction of both Serbo-Croat and Turkic epic poetry. In Salih Ugljanin's 'The Captivity of Djulić Ibrahim' we find both flexible formulaic expressions of the idea of plundering and burning and a more rigid and patterned expression of the same idea in a parallel structure:

Po selima kuće popaljilji,
Po selima roblje porobilji ...

They set fire to the houses in the villages,
and they took captives in the villages.³³

Compare:

Palju selja a roblje robaju ... (l.125)
E rob se roblje po Udbini.
Sve se sela redom zapaljiše. (ll.135-6)

They set fire to the villages and captured captives ...
They took prisoners through Udbina.
Burned all the villages one after another.

Parallelism can also be used to construct longer and more complicated patterns, similar to the use of core repetition (*Kernwiederholung*) and framework repetition (*Rahmenwiederholung*) in the structuring of Finnish traditional poetry or the Russian *byliny*.³⁴ In the Serbo-Croat song just cited there are various examples of chain parallelism:

Molji Boga da mu <i>vetar puhne</i> ,	[Tale] prayed to God that the
Ej, da <i>vetar</i> sa planine <i>puhne</i> ,	wind might blow
Pa da vidi čije društvo <i>gine</i> ,	that the wind might blow from
Koje <i>gine</i> a koje dobije.	the mountains,
<i>Vetar puhnu</i> , maglu rasturijo.	so that he might see which
	company was losing,
	which was losing and which
	was victorious.
	The wind blew and scattered
	the cloud.
	(ll.1649-52; cf. ll.1634-37)

Uzbek singers cultivate the structuring of longer passages on strictly

³³ Milman Parry, Albert Bates Lord (colls, eds, trans), *Serbo-Croatian Heroic Songs*, Cambridge, MA, 1953-54, II, pp. 55-74 (cf. I, p. 90-113).

³⁴ Matti Kuusi, 'Über Wiederholungstypen in der Volksepik unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Edda, der Bylinen und der finnisch-estnischen Volksdichtung', *Studia Fennica*, VI, 1952, pp. 59-138. Cf. also John Miletich, 'The Poetics of Variation in Oral-Traditional Narrative', *Forum at Iowa on Russian Literature*, I, 1976, pp. 57-69 and 'Repetition and Aesthetic Function in the *Poema de Mio Cid* and South-Slavic Oral and Literary Epic' (*Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, LVIII, 1981, pp. 189-96).

parallel principles, such as exemplified by the following stanza from the *dāstān Rawšan*. Here every line consists of an identical half-line and a parallelistic half-line, centred on the expression 'my so-and-so (garden, jewel, etc.)':

Umrimga bahārīm, senga yol bolsin?
 Tālpingan šunqārīm, senga yol bolsin?
 Bir qozi, qoçqārīm, senga yol bolsin?
 Nawda osgan činārīm, senga yol bolsin?
 Sāyinsam umārīm, senga yol bolsin?

Spring of my life, where are you going?
 My falcon, beating your wings, where are you going?
 My lamb, my ram, where are you going?
 My plane tree with fresh leaves, where are you going?
 My dearest wish, where are you going?³⁵

This pattern continues for another stanza and is then taken up again in the last line of every consecutive stanza.

In Turkic oral epics the link between parallelism and formulaic diction is particularly close in the themes or type-scenes of the poems, such as for instance the hero's ride through the desert or the approach to battle. The theme of the hero's ride plays a prominent role in Uzbek epic poetry. One of the formulaically expressed motifs of this type-scene is the swift gallop of the horse, snorting and whizzing, with the hero's boots and stirrups clanging. In *Rawšan* this motif is expressed in the following way:

Āt bārādī arillab, ātgan oqday šarillab, āt alqimi-tāñ šamāl	The horse is running snorting, whizzing like a flying arrow. The wind caused by the horse is like the morning wind,
mis karnayday zarillab,	ringing like a copper <i>karnay</i> [wind instrument].
5 suwsiz čolda Ğirkok āt bārayātīr parillab. Āt bārādī asirlab, ātgan oqday tasirlab, tilla uzangi, mahsi kawš	In the waterless desert, the horse Ğirkok is racing along. The horse is running intoxicated, whizzing like a flying arrow. The golden stirrups, the boots
10 tepsinganda qasirlab. ³⁶	are banging together and singing.

This passage shows an intricate patterning of sound and morpho-syntactic structure, revolving around two groups of mostly onomatopoeic verbs (*arilla-*, *šarilla-*, *zarilla-*, *parilla-* + *asirla-*, *tasirla-*, *qasirla-*). Line 7 takes up line 1, with *asirlab* varying *arillab*

³⁵ Zarif, op. cit., p. 68.

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 76-77.

(‘analogous parallelism’), while line 8 takes up line 2, with *tasirlab* varying *šarillab* (‘synonymous parallelism’). Lines 2 and 8 are also syntactically parallel to line 4; a similar syntactic parallelism exists between lines 1 and 6. Rhyme, syntax and formulaic diction all combine in the expression of this motif.

Not only motifs, but whole type-scenes can be structured by parallelism. When Hasan comes to the rescue of his son Rawšan in the same epic, the hero’s ride through the desert is described in a long passage (572 octosyllabic lines in the manuscript), a large portion of which is formed on the following pattern:

Qulān yurmas yerlardan
quwib otib bāradī.
Bulān yurmas yerlardan
boʻyib otib bāradī.

Through regions untrodden by the wild ass
he is riding swiftly.
Through regions untrodden by the wild horse
he is riding, shortening the distance.³⁷

In Serbo-Croat epic poetry a parallel passage can also function as a structural principle, not only of a scene but also of a whole song. In ‘The Captivity of Djulić Ibrahim’ the lines:

Je lj’ Krajina još naš u Turčina,
A stoju lji bosanske gazije,
A sedu lji kahve i mehane,
A sedu lji hani pa dućani,
A kupu lj’ se jage pod Udbinu,
Pod Udbinu na lonđu zeljenu?

Is our Border still in the hands of the Turks?
Are the Bosnian heroes still there?
Are the coffee houses and taverns still standing,
and the inns and shops?
Do the aghas gather in Udbina,
in the green arbor in Udbina?

occur four times (II, 35ff., 66ff., 550ff., 591ff.), emphasizing the progression of the narrative and its segmentation into various movements. The following lines from ‘The Death of the Mother of the Jugovići’ have a similar function:

³⁷ Ibid., p.189. Cf. Reichl, op. cit., pp. 184-87. The translation of *boʻyib* is that suggested in V. M. Zhirmunsky, Kh. T. Zarifov, *Uzbekskiy narodnyi geroicheskiy epos*, Moscow, 1947, p. 445. The primary meaning of *boγ-* is, however, ‘to strangle’; ‘to press together’.

u toj vojsci devet Jugovića
i deseti star Juže Bogdane

and in that army the nine Jugovići
and as the tenth, the old Jug-Bogdan.³⁸

The nine Jugovići and their father are first introduced in lines 3-4, then related to their mother, who wants to see them (lines 9-10), then sees them dead (lines 15-16) and finally dies of a broken heart:

za svojije devet Jugovića
i desetim star-Jugom Bogdanom.

for her nine Jugovići
and the tenth, the old Jug-Bogdan. (ll.83-84)

The almost ritualistic nature of these repetitions is enhanced by the further amplifications (using the number 'nine') in a largely parallel passage:

i više nji devet bojni koplja,
na kopljima devet sokolova,
oko koplja devet dobri konja,
a pored nji devet ljuti lava.
Tad zavrišta devet dobri konja,
i zalaja devet ljuti lava ...

... at their heads, nine battle-lances,
on the lances nine falcons,
around the lances nine good horses,
and in front of them nine angry lions.
Then the nine good horses neighed,
and the nine angry lions roared ... (ll.17ff.)

Parallelism, repetition and formulaic diction are stylistic and structural traits also of other *junačke pjesme*. They are brilliantly exploited, for instance, in 'Marko Drinks Wine in Ramazan', a poem which has been aptly described as a 'rondo in language'.³⁹ This interweaving of parallel and formulaic diction, of repetition and 'rhythmical symmetry' is also characteristic of the poems of the *Uskok* and *Hajduk* Cycles. Thus we find, for instance, at the beginning of 'Ivan of Senj Executes the Commander of Bihać' the following letter written by the *kapetan* of Bihać to the commander of Senj:

'Pobratime, senjski komandante,
Podaj meni Senj grad pokraj mora,
Podaj meni Senjkinje divojke,

³⁸ Karadžić, II, pp. 296-99.

³⁹ Maximilian Braun, *Das serbokroatische Heldenlied*, Göttingen, 1961, p. 67.

Da izbirem koja bude za me,
 Podaj meni Senjane junake
 Sve pod izbor u košuljah tankih,
 Da ne tratim praha ni olova,
 Da ne vučem na Senj grad lumbarde,
 Da ne rušim Senja pokraj mora.'

'Blood-brother, commander of Senj,
 give me the town of Senj on the sea,
 give me the girls of Senj,
 so that I can choose one for myself,
 give me the young men of Senj,
 all the ones chosen in fine shirts,
 so that I do not waste either powder or lead,
 so that I do not drag cannons to Senj,
 so that I do not destroy Senj on the sea.'⁴⁰ (ll.3-11)

The phraseology of this highly patterned, parallel passage is taken up again in the course of the poem, first in the answer the commander of Senj sends, asking the *kapetan* of Bihać to drag his cannons to Senj and promising him that the young men of Senj will indeed gather to await him, and later in the poem, when the *kapetan* of Bihać levels his cannons at Senj. His imperious *podaj!*, 'give!', is echoed by the ironic *čekaj!*, 'wait!', Ivan Senjanin shouts to him at the moment of his death:

Vezao mu ruke naopako,
 Pa ga tuče teškim buzdohanom
 I još mu je junak besidio:
 'Čekaj, beže, ovako se veže
 Čekaj, vuče, ovako se tuče,
 Čekaj, paša, ovo j' zemlja naša.'
 Mahne ćordu, odsiće mu glavu.

[Ivan] tied his hands behind his
 back,
 then he beat him with a heavy mace
 and the young man also said to him:
 'Wait, beg, this is how one ties,
 wait, wolf, this is how one beats,
 wait, pasha, this is our land.'
 He brandished his sword and cut
 off his head. (ll.62-68)

The strict parallelism of the direct speech is reinforced by the internal rhyme (*beže/veže/*, *vuče/tuče*, *paša/naša*), underlining in this way the dramatic climax of the poem.

We can conclude that parallel verse performs a variety of functions in Turkic and South Slav oral poetry. It brings a lyrical element into the narrative, in particular in the *dāstān*-tradition of Central Asia, resulting in verse passages not unlike the Old Portuguese poem quoted above. The 'imagistic' nature images in the Turkic epics emphasize the emotive force of the poem, one of the uses of parallelism also in Serbo-Croat oral poetry.⁴¹ Parallelism can also play an important role in the structuring of narrative units. The unfolding of the action, in a highly

⁴⁰ A. Mijatović (ed.), *Senjski uskoci u narodnoj pjesmi i povijesti*, Zagreb, 1983, pp. 98-100 [*Biblioteka vijenac knjiga*, XIV]. On Ivan Senjanin see Maria Kleut, *Ivan Senjanin u srpskohrvatskim usmenim pesmama*, Novi Sad, 1987.

⁴¹ Cf. Kravtsov, op. cit., p. 300.

stylized way, based on similarity, contrast and repetition, is reminiscent of the technique of 'incremental repetition' as found in the English and Scottish ballads, as well as elsewhere.⁴² As a structural element parallelism is predominantly content-orientated. The land/water contrast parallelistically introduced at the beginning of *Kögütey* turns out to be a major constitutive element of the narrative semantics of the epic, since the main hero, the beaver, is indeed the son of land and water. The protagonist of *Kögütey* has, as C. M. Bowra has observed, much of the shaman in him.⁴³ One might argue that also stylistically, by its use of parallel verse, *Kögütey* reflects the incantations of the Altaic shaman with their high degree of symmetrical patterning.⁴⁴ Although it seems likely that one of the roots of parallelism in Turkic epic poetry is the poetry of the Siberian shaman, the major function of parallelism in the recorded epics is poetic rather than incantational. As a form of 'rhythmical symmetry' parallelism transforms prose into verse, it creates a poetic world of similarities and it contrasts, moulds language into harmonious patterns. As one of the stylistic devices intimately connected to the formulaic diction of the oral epic, parallelism in Turkic as well as Serbo-Croat epic poetry adds an aesthetic dimension to the narrative technique of the 'singer of tales'.

⁴² K. Jackson, 'Incremental Repetition in the Early Welsh *Englyn*' (*Speculum*, XVI, 1941, pp. 304-21).

⁴³ C. M. Bowra, *Heroic Poetry*, London, 1952, p. 6.

⁴⁴ For examples see W. Radloff, *Aus Sibirien*, I, 2nd edn, Leipzig, 1893, pp. 341-43; Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, Princeton, 1964, pp. 190-97.

Chapter Twelve

Modern Greek and South Slav oral tradition: specific contrasts and theoretical implications

RODERICK BEATON

Interest in oral folk poetry in Modern Greek is manifested in Europe from within a few years of the publication by Vuk Karadžić of his collection of Serbian songs in 1814, and is to a considerable extent a consequence of that initiative.¹ The first printed collection of Greek folk poetry appeared in Paris, in two volumes, while the Greek war of independence against the Ottoman Empire was at its height.² As in other Balkan countries, subsequent collection, and more or less scholarly study, of these songs in the nineteenth century and beyond were almost exclusively text-centred, with folk song texts being co-opted in a variety of ways to the more general cultural quest of that period for a stable national identity and 'authentic' tradition.³

The subject of the present chapter will not, however, be the appropriation and assimilation of the oral tradition by the national culture in Greece, but will focus instead on the internal dynamics of one particular oral tradition in Greek, that of narrative song, in contrast to the analysis of South Slav oral poetry by Milman Parry and Albert Lord. My purpose in doing so is to offer some foundation for the more general, theoretical claim that oral tradition is not a single, monolithic type of verbal art which can be simply contrasted with written literature, but rather, just like written literature itself, is capable of supporting a variety of genres. Such genres may be distinguished clearly in terms of differing artistic aims and methods. My strategy in pursuing this line of analysis is determined by the belief, which cannot be further justified within the scope of a chapter such as this, that (written) literature is in effect a special (and specialized) case of the much larger

¹ Cf. M. Ibrovac, *Claude Fauriel et la fortune européenne des poésies populaires grecques et serbes*, Paris, 1966; A. Polítis, *I anakálipsi ton ellinikón dimotikón tragoudiôn*, Athens, 1984; Roderick Beaton, *Folk Poetry of Modern Greece*, Cambridge, 1980, pp. 3-8.

² C. Fauriel, *Chants populaires de la Grèce moderne*, 2 vols, Paris, 1824-25.

³ A. Kiriakídou-Nestoros, *I theoriá tis ellinikís laografías*, Athens, 1978; Michael Herzfeld, *Ours Once More: Folklore, Ideology and the Making of Modern Greece*, Austin, Texas, 1982; Roderick Beaton, 'The Oral Traditions of Modern Greece' (*Oral Tradition*, 1, 1986, pp. 110-33).

phenomenon of verbal art, the greater part of which has, until at least very recently, been oral.⁴ The study of the world's oral traditions, as I believe, may tell us something (however paradoxically) about the 'textuality' on which all literature is based, in which artistic ends primarily conceived in oral traditional terms are transformed but never superseded by the new means, or medium, of writing.

Parry and Lord solved the problem of composition and transmission of oral poetry in its most intractable form — that of the epic which may amount to 10,000 lines or more. But the great majority of subsequent studies which have concerned themselves with the 'oral-formulaic theory' have confined themselves to no more than a single genre of oral tradition. Lord was even careful to distinguish between the oral singer as he is found today in the former Yugoslavia and the British or American folk singer: 'Even in the realm of oral literature most of us in the West, at least, are more accustomed to the ballad than to the epic; and our experience has been formed in large part by folk ballad singers who are mere performers.'⁵ The implication is that while epics are oral, ballads are not.

But elsewhere Lord states his definition of 'oral epic song' in terms which must necessarily also be applicable to other types of oral poetry:

Stated briefly, oral epic song is narrative poetry composed in a manner evolved over many generations by singers of tales who did not know how to write; it consists of the building of metrical lines and half lines by means of formulas and formulaic expressions and of the building of songs by the use of themes. This is the technical sense in which I shall use the word 'oral' and 'oral epic' in this book.⁶

In his search for a living oral tradition whose method of composition and transmission might elucidate the mystery of the Homeric epics, Lord fell into the assumption that all oral poetry must necessarily be of this type. Since not all Serbo-Croat epic poems are long, he was able to state, 'Length, in fact, is not a criterion of epic poetry.'⁷ This is a logical result of conflating the terms 'oral' and 'oral epic', which in the previous passage quoted Lord was prepared to use interchangeably.⁸

⁴ Cf. W. Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, London, New York, 1982; 'Text as Interpretation: Mark and After', in J.M. Foley (ed.), *Oral Tradition in Literature: Interpretation in Context*, Columbia, Missouri, 1986, pp. 147-69.

⁵ Albert Bates Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, Cambridge, MA, 1960, p. 13.

⁶ Ibid., p. 8.

⁷ Ibid., p. 6.

⁸ The more sweeping objection to the 'oral formulaic theory' by Ruth Finnegan (*Oral Poetry: its Nature, Significance and Social Context*, Cambridge, 1977) also makes this point, but Finnegan's sociological approach to her subject fails to provide convincing evidence for the way in which many of the different types of oral tradition that she describes actually work (cf. John Miles Foley, *Balkan Studies*, 20, 1979, pp. 470-75; Ong, op. cit., p. 62).

Length is indeed a criterion of epic poetry, since any art form whose chief content is narrative is bound to seek development in linear expansion to a greater or lesser degree. Lord would have avoided this confusion had he written instead, 'length is not a criterion of *oral* poetry'.

But the tacit assumption that epic is oral, while ballads for instance are merely 'orally performed', or in the terminology of David Buchan⁹ 'verbal', has struck. Parry, it is true, had apparently allocated the ballad a place in the oral scheme:

The song which has only a few hundred verses in the hut of some hard-working tiller of the soil, whose time for such sport is short, will run into thousands of verses when sung before some noble by a singer who, raised among men with great leisure for talk and song, has had time to become fully practised in a highly developed art. The difference between such long and short versions of the same song lies in what the singers call 'adornment'.¹⁰

But Parry too was looking at it from the angle of the Homeric scholar, whose chief concern was not with 'oral poetry' but with 'oral epic poetry'. In many areas of Greece, until comparatively recently, wedding feasts and religious festivals could last a week or more, during which song was in constant demand, and the tillers of the soil had ample leisure and opportunity to practise a 'highly developed art'. The art they produced is indeed highly developed, but its development did not find expression in the greater length of its songs. This is oral song, it is 'developed' song, but the manner of its development is precisely what differentiates it clearly from 'oral *epic* song'.

The songs I shall be discussing here are narrative songs, in length and style comparable to Western ballads, though without their stanzaic forms, and composed usually in unrhymed fifteen-syllable lines, with a marked and invariable caesura after the eighth syllable. These narrative ballads (for which no single Greek generic term exists) differ in important respects from the epic narratives analysed by Lord and most other practitioners of the 'oral-formulaic theory'. In the Greek songs the principles of oral composition are applied to a different end from that of the Serbo-Croat epics. The most striking differences can be observed in the use and structure of the formula, a different type of parataxis or 'adding style', in musical delivery and in the treatment of time.

Formulas and formula systems

Given that songs rarely exceed a hundred lines in length, and that few collections make any reference to the repertory of a single singer, we would hardly expect the principle of 'thrift' identified by Lord, to apply

⁹ D. Buchan, *The Ballad and the Folk*, London, 1972.

¹⁰ Cited in J. Notopoulos, 'Modern Greek Heroic Oral Poetry and its Relevance to Homer' (Text accompanying Folkways record FE 4468), New York, 1959, p. 5.

to Greek folk song as it has been collected. (This was the principle, it will be remembered, that a single singer would not normally have more than one formula, throughout his repertory, in which a given sense was expressed in a given metrical pattern.) However, even within individual songs we find, alongside a thirty per cent count of 'straight formula', a number of evidently formulaic phrases in which variations have been introduced that according to the principles of composition by the *guslari* would have been unnecessary. Clearly these formulaic phrases serve more than a mnemonic purpose. Throughout Greek folk song the essential structural unit is not so much the formula, that is the fixed or bound phrase¹¹ but what I have elsewhere termed a 'formulaic matrix', that is a cluster of metrical, syntactical, antithetic or balancing, and sense patterns, which are themselves merely extensions of the linguistic and thought patterns of Greek traditional culture.¹²

The unit of composition of these songs is the half-line, and the traditional fifteen-syllable line is composed of two not quite equal parts. Appendix 2 illustrates in summary form how the first eleven lines of the ballad 'The Bridge of Arta' (full English translation at Appendix 1) have been realized from formulaic patterns held in suspension, as it were, in the singer's special linguistic competence as a singer, and identifiable through their different realizations in varying contexts in other songs.¹³

The 'adding style'

The grammatical device of parataxis, and the absence of periodic enjambement (where the sense is incomplete at the end of a line) are regarded by Lord as 'a characteristic of oral composition and ... one of

¹¹ Paul Kiparsky, 'Oral Poetry: Some Linguistic and Typological Considerations', in B. Stolz, R. Shannon (eds), *Oral Literature and the Formula*, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1976, pp. 73-106.

¹² My analysis of the Greek formula system was partly prompted by and in turn lends further support to the 'generative' theory of the formula mapped out by Nagler ('Towards a Generative View of the Oral Formula' (*Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 98, pp. 269-311); *Spontaneity and Tradition: a Study in the Oral Art of Homer*, Berkeley, 1974). It is also broadly in sympathy with the 'organic', as opposed to mechanical models of formulaic discourse proposed by B. Peabody (*The Winged Word: a Study in the Technique of Ancient Greek Oral Composition as seen Principally through Hesiod's 'Works and Days'*, Albany, NY, 1975) and David Bynum (*The Daemon in the Wood*, Cambridge, MA, 1978).

¹³ These ideas are fully developed in Beaton, *Folk Poetry of Modern Greece*, pp. 35-57 and 'Was Digenes Akrites an Oral Poem?' (*Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 7, 1981, p. 7-27). They have not so far been seriously challenged (but see contra G. Saunier, *To dimotikó tragoúdi: tis xenitiás*, Athens, 1983, pp. 11-14; *Revue des Etudes Grecques*, 948, 1985, pp. 321-22). A valuable refinement of the 'matrix' model, which has recently been proposed for the more restricted field of kleptic songs by R. van Boeschoten (*From Armatolik to People's Rule, 1750-1949*, doctoral thesis, University of Amsterdam, 1987, pp. 50-59), deserves to be taken up in further research.

the easiest touchstones to apply in testing the orality of a poem'.¹⁴ Both parataxis and the sense unit of the end-stopped line are found almost universally in Greek folk poetry. But the term by which this has come to be known, the 'adding style', is not wholly appropriate to the juxtapositions of the Greek songs. Once again a difference of fundamental intention can be discerned.

Lord quotes an example of the 'adding style' in narrative:

Wherever he went, he asked for Alija.
 They said he was in the city of Kajnida.
 When the messenger came to Kajnida,
 He passed along the main street,
 Then he approached the new shopkeeper,
 And he asked for Alija's court.
 The shopkeeper pointed out the court to him.
 When the messenger came to the gate,
 He beat with the knocker on the door.
 The knocker rang and the gate resounded.¹⁵

When this passage is set beside the opening lines of the Greek ballad, 'The Bridge of Arta' (see Appendices), the difference at once becomes clear. In the Serbo-Croat example the effect is cumulative. By quick cutting from one detail to another an impression of breathless action is achieved by leaving unconnected a series of details whose actual purpose is to delay and fill out the action. There is nothing inherently exciting in being told that the messenger walked down the main street and approached the new shopkeeper, but when this detail is placed in a cumulative context, it satisfies the listener's feelings of suspense which have already been created, since it brings him, he feels, one step closer to the climax of the action, and yet heightens his suspense because it has still not told him what he wants to know. Such a technique is only possible when recitation is rapid, and the effect of the song is to be achieved by accumulation.

In 'The Bridge of Arta' the effect is quite different: the action is highly compressed, we move abruptly from the imperfect tense describing the labour of the previous three years to the lamentations of the builders in the present. Then we are suddenly distanced once again when the 'spirit' appears, in the past tense. The poem is built out of tensions rather than accumulations; tensions between balancing opposites such as the master-craftsmen and apprentices, and the building of the bridge by day and its falling down by night. In Greek folk songs, it must be concluded, the so-called 'adding style' is rather a system of juxtaposition of opposites than of true addition. A Greek song is short and contains a complex pattern of 'pluses' and 'minuses', whereas in

¹⁴ Lord, *op.cit.*, p. 54.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 54-55.

epic song, where parataxis is used, it adds pluses together to build a linear narrative or detailed sequential description.

Music and performance

No tradition of oral poetry can be divorced from the music to which the songs are sung. But the possibility that different ways of combining words and music in song reflect basic differences in the nature of a tradition has not really been explored. Lord has rightly emphasized that in oral tradition singing, performing and composing are aspects of the same act.¹⁶ The manner in which a song is sung may tell us something about the poet's (and his audience's) generic intentions. The free-flowing 'recitative' styles used by the Yugoslav and other epic singers in the Balkans can be regarded therefore as not so much the *result* of the epic length of pre-existing songs which had somehow to be set to music, but as a further expression of the underlying structure or 'Gestalt' which underlies the tradition.¹⁷

By contrast with this rapid 'recitative' of the Serbian *guslari*, in the Greek oral tradition we encounter a rich variety of musical styles, in which regional differences are very marked. It will only be possible here to consider predominant features which are generally constant, although deployed differently throughout the Greek-speaking world. The music to which narrative songs are sung is characterized by lack of isometry (i.e. of fit between metrical and musical phrases), by interpolation of words and phrases to adapt the metre to the rhythm and length of an otherwise incompatible musical phrase, by repetition of parts of the line, and by repetition of whole lines. These characteristics are not, of course, all found together in the same song but are clearly interrelated, and any 'explanation' must take all of them into account. That all these characteristics represent aspects of the same phenomenon has not generally been realized, and none of the 'historical' explanations that have been proposed is entirely convincing.¹⁸

The song is in a sense a static unit; a single situation or a response to events is created out of a complex patterning of half-lines, images and themes. The reason for repetition, therefore, and one of the reasons for the interjections, is to slow down the pace of the song, to allow the patterns to reflect one another, and above all, to allow the attention of the audience to focus on the single half-line, whose contents are rarely repeated later in the song, but which may contain an image or an idea

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁷ M.N. Nagler, *Spontaneity and Tradition: a Study in the Oral Art of Homer*, Berkeley, 1967.

¹⁸ See respectively: S. Kiriakídis, *To dimotikó tragoúdi*, Athens, 1978, pp. 209-80; S. Baud-Bovy, *Etudes sur la chanson cleftique*, Athens, 1958; 'I epikrátisi tou dekapentaskillavou sto ellinikó dimotikó tragoúdi' (*Elliniká*, 26, 1973, pp. 301-13); K. Roméos, 'I yénnisi tou oktasíllavou sta mirolóyia tis Mánis' (*Peloponnisiaká*, 6, 1963, pp. 103-28).

essential to the singer's meaning. If we assume, on good historical grounds, that the predominant fifteen-syllable metre is at least a thousand years old as a standard form for oral poetry,¹⁹ the various musical deviations from the pattern can be seen as offsetting and so actually highlighting the patterns of the verbal 'text' which they in fact often cut across.

Treatment of time

One of the reasons why it has always been difficult to differentiate clearly between 'epic' and 'ballad' is that both have been regarded equally as motivated by the narrative impulse. Briefly, however, the distinction may be stated like this: in epic, as in the literary narrative forms which have superseded it in the West, the emphasis is on diachrony; in ballad it is on synchrony. This is not a distinction between superficial attributes; the attitude to time and its representation in art which is shared by performer and audience during a performance is something which affects every aspect of the singer's craft.

Epic narrative creates a time-scale of its own; events form a continuous sequence, and the relationship of one event to another is expressed in terms of before and after. For this to be possible, the action must be distanced, and placed in a time-perspective which is not that of the present. To put it in the broadest terms possible, epic is the product of a historical, or diachronic way of thinking, and is perhaps the closest that a non-literate community can approximate to true history, while the ballad is produced by a characteristically *synchronic* attitude to the past. In epic song the relationship between past and present, and between the events in the past, is clearly established by a number of simple indications. First of all, an epic song consists of a series of events (Parry's 'themes'), of which almost any one can be the starting point, so long as the others follow chronologically, or at least cumulatively.²⁰

In a Greek ballad we do not generally find such a progression. The action may comprise no more than a single event arising out of a given situation; or in many cases a pair of events, whose temporal relation is less important than the antithesis in which they stand. Examples would

¹⁹ M. Jeffreys, 'The Nature and Origins of the Political Verse', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 28, 1974, pp. 141-95; M. Alexiou, D. Holton, 'The Origins and Development of *politikos stichos*: a Select Bibliography' (*Mandatoforos*, 9, 1976, pp. 22-34); L. Polítis, 'Neóteres apópsis yia ti yénnisi ke ti domí tou dekapentasíllavou' (*Praktiká tis Akadimías Athinón*, 56, 1981, pp. 211-18).

²⁰ For the characteristic structure of an epic narrative in the former Yugoslavia see the sequence of themes set out by Lord (*The Singer of Tales*) as his Appendix II. Ong (op. cit., pp. 141-47) perhaps exaggerates the lack of linear 'plot' in true oral epic, but his remarks remind us that the oral epic poet proceeds by an accumulation of episodes, whether or not they are narrated in strict chronological sequence.

be the 'Dead Brother',²¹ where Kostandínos' key role in marrying off his sister abroad against his mother's wishes is reflected and balanced by his return from the grave to bring her home again, so that the song's unity is unaffected by the considerable interval of time between these events (indeed in hearing or reading the song we are hardly aware of this at all); or the simpler songs of 'Girl Unjustly Put to Death',²² where the first event (the girl's kissing the traveller) creates a special situation which is resolved by the second, antithetical, event (the girl's death at the hands of her brothers). In these examples the relation between events is either implicitly or, in the second case, explicitly one of cause and effect, but it need not be so. One of the Pontic songs of the death of the hero²³ begins with a description of Akrítas building a garden in which the birds come to nest and sing of the long life ahead of the hero, until one day they change their tune and prophesy his death. This is the first event, or 'theme', in Parry's sense. The second describes Akrítas going hunting, meeting and wrestling with the personified figure of Death. In the song as it stands, these two themes form a perfect antithesis, although their relation can be described neither in terms of causation nor of temporal progression.

The absence of temporal clauses in Greek ballads is conspicuous. 'When'-clauses are used only to relate events which happen *at the same time*:

The Turks when they were attacking the City [Constantinople], and Romanía [the Byzantine empire].²⁴

When the church saw him, in three places it cracked.²⁵

There are no formulas of the type, 'When he had done this ... *then* he did that ...', which create the illusion of a time-continuum.

In particular we do not find songs which begin with a deliberate distancing of the action in time. Many of the Serbo-Croat songs begin with some variation of 'It happened once in time long past; long ago it was, and now we remember it even in this place where we are gathered and in every other.'²⁶ Others begin more abruptly, but none the less immediately establish a time-context: 'When Mujo was a shepherd ...'; 'When Mujo departed ...'²⁷ Others again use variants of the 'Once upon

²¹ D. Petrópoulos, *Elliniká dimotiká tragoúdia*, Athens, 1958-59: Vol. 1, pp. 69-71 (translation in Alexiou, 'Sons, Wives and Mothers', *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, 1, 1983, pp. 95-96).

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 117-18.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

²⁶ Milman Parry, Albert Bates Lord, *Serbocroatian Heroic Songs*, 1, Cambridge, MA, 1954, Nos 1, 4.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, Nos 8, 9.

a time' formula we find in other traditional narrative forms: 'One morning two captains arose early ...'; 'Once Mujo was wounded ...'.²⁸

In the Greek song there are few standard preliminaries. Usually the first line directly introduces a person or depicts a situation:

Andrónikos the renowned, the richly brought up.²⁹

Diyenís is in the throes of death and the earth trembles before him.³⁰

If time is mentioned at all it is almost always in terms of the present — it happened, not in times long past but 'yesterday', 'today', 'now', 'tonight'. The ballad singer is never upset by the resulting confusion of narrative tenses. Indeed the Greek singer's use of verb tenses in general provides a further indication of the attitude to time he consciously or unconsciously adopts. A common formula in laments is:

He lamented [impf.] and said [impf.], he laments and says.

The effect of combining a past and present tense in this way not only makes the situation which the singer describes more immediate to his audience (in the manner of the narrative 'dramatic present') but more significantly gives a universality to the specific situation. By this means the women who sing dirges (*mirolóyia*) remind themselves and whoever else is present that death and mourning are perennial as well as immediate facts of life.

An epic song, on the other hand, is set far back in the past, and although this past may be as much a reflection of present conditions known to each generation of singers as an account of a historical past, it seems to be a feature of epic song that the past represented should contrast with the present, usually to the detriment of the latter. In Homer we find past and present contrasted in the following terms: 'But Hector seized a stone that lay before the gates ... Two men could not easily lever that stone from the ground into a cart, not two of the strongest as men are now, but he managed it easily alone'³¹ and an identical device is found in the Serbian song of 'The Sister of Leka Kapetan' where Miloš dresses himself for the wooing expedition in a mantle, 'such as today no King possesseth'.³² There is in fact (in no derogatory sense) an element of nostalgia in all epic traditions — they almost always flourish in a period of decline, or at least of decline of the values which they uphold, as can be seen in the Homeric epics, in

²⁸ Ibid., Nos 13, 16.

²⁹ Petrópoulos, op.cit., p. 34.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 24.

³¹ *Iliad*, (trans. W. H. D. Rouse), Book 12, lines 447-49.

³² D. Subotić, *Yugoslav Popular Ballads: Their Origin and Development*, Cambridge, 1932, p. 33.

Virgil writing after the end of the old Roman republic, in Camoens writings the *Lusiads* as Portugal was already losing her grip on her recently won empire (to say nothing of Milton's post-lapsarian Christian epic *Paradise Lost*), in the Old French *Song of Roland*, composed when the new *pax romana* had put an end to such spectacular displays of heroism as Roland's, and in the Serbian epics, many of which still centre round the Battle of Kosovo and the destruction of the Serbian Kingdom in the fourteenth century.

In Greek tradition the prodigious strength of heroes such as Diyenís and Porfíris is never associated with a lost heroic age. Such a 'heroic age' in epic tradition is represented as belonging to an epoch of historical time, and can be rendered vivid today by contrast with the present. Characters on the scale of Diyenís or Kostandínos may not actually exist, except as a paradigm in people's minds, but their existence there belongs to now and always; it is untouched by historical time.

Thus the act of ballad composition and the techniques employed belong to a unified mode of thought which is the antithesis of that of epic song. Since the ballad singer, at least in the Greek tradition, thinks in terms of the present, narrative elements are used to create and/or to resolve a state of tension, exactly as images are used in a lyric.

These differences between South Slav and Greek traditional oral narrative song cannot be explained in purely mechanical terms — any more, indeed, than the observation of strict recurrences of formulas has ever been able to explain the artistic achievement of a Homer or an Avdo Medjedović. By insisting on formulaic composition as a special type of language use, it may now become possible to understand the motivation, as well as the techniques, of different kinds of oral poetry, in terms of generic intentions.

APPENDIX I

The Greek ballad, 'The Bridge of Arta'

This is one of the most widely diffused and best-known of the Greek ballads, and I give it in full in a line-by-line English translation by way of illustrating, for those less familiar with the Greek oral tradition, a fairly typical example of the oral genre which is the main subject of this chapter.³³

The first eleven lines are given in Greek in Appendix II.

- 1 Forty-five master-craftsmen and sixty apprentices
- 2 for three years worked on Arta's bridge.
- 3 All day they'd build and in the evening it collapses.
- 4 The master-craftsmen lament and the apprentices weep:
- 5 'Alas for our labours, alas for our work,
- 6 building all day, in the evening it collapsing.'
- 7 and the *stihio*³⁴ replied from the right-hand arch:
- 8 'Unless you sacrifice³⁵ a human, no wall will stand firm;
- 9 and don't sacrifice an orphan, not a stranger, not a traveller,
- 10 but the master-builder's beautiful wife,
- 11 who slowly comes in the morning, who slowly comes at mealtime.'
- The master-builder heard it and is mortally stricken;
- he writes a letter and sends it with the bird, the nightingale.
- 'Slowly may she dress, slowly change her clothes, slowly come at mealtime,
- 15 slowly may she come and cross the bridge of Arta.'
- And the bird misheard and differently went and said:
- 'Quickly dress, quickly change your clothes, quickly come at mealtime,
- quickly may you go and cross the bridge of Arta.'
- There she was appearing again from the white road.
- 20 The master-builder saw her, his heart is breaking.
- From afar she greets them and from afar she says to them:
- 'Health and joy to you, master-craftsmen, and to you, apprentices,
- but what's the matter with the master-builder to make him look so
- bilious?
- 'His ring has fallen into the first arch

³³ The story of the 'walled up wife' is known in a wide range of variants from around the Balkans, especially from Romania and Bulgaria. For the (largely inconclusive) research that has been carried out on its diffusion see L. Vargyas, *Researches into the Medieval History of Folk Ballads*, Budapest, 1967, pp. 173ff.; G. Megas, *Die Ballade von der Arta-Brücke*, Thessaloníki, 1976. For a critique of these approaches and for a discussion of the problems and possibilities of interpretation presented by this ballad see Beaton, *Folk Poetry of Modern Greece*, pp. 116-24. The present version, taken from D. Petrópoulos, *Elliniká dimotiká tragoúdia*, Athens, 1958-59, Vol. 1, pp. 72-73, is one of the earliest to have been recorded and was first published in 1860. Over 300 versions of this song have been recorded.

³⁴ A supernatural being which, in Greek popular belief, can manifest itself in a variety of forms; roughly equivalent to the guardian spirit of a locality. Interestingly, its name is a close derivation of the ancient Greek *stoicheio*: an element.

³⁵ Literally, 'make into a *stihio*', a rare if not unique usage. Normally the verb *stihiono* is intransitive and means 'to become haunted'.

- 25 and who can go in and who can come out again to find the ring?
'Master-builder, do not grieve, and I will bring it for you;
I shall be the one to go in and come out again to find the ring.'
She had scarcely gone down, she had scarcely got half way.
'Pull, my dear, the chain, pull upon the links,
30 for I've searched the whole world through and nothing have I
found.'
One lays on with the trowel and another with the lime,
the master-builder takes up and throws a great stone.
'Alas for our fate, alas for our fortune,
three sisters we were, all three of us evilly fated.
35 One built the Danube [bridge], another the Avlóna,
and I the last of all the bridge of Arta.
The way my poor heart trembles, may the bridge tremble;
and the way my hair falls out, may the travellers fall off.'
'Girl, change your words and give a different curse
40 since you've a dear and only brother, let him not chance to cross.'
And she changed her words and gives a different curse:
'[Like] iron [be] my poor heart, [like] iron [too] the bridge,
[Like] iron [be] my hair, [like] iron [too] the travellers.
For I have a brother in a foreign land, let it not fall to him to cross.'

APPENDIX II

Formula Systems in 'The Bridge of Arta'

The first eleven lines of the ballad (for English translation see Appendix I) are juxtaposed with lines and half-lines from other songs taken from throughout the representative collection by D. Petrópoulos (1958-59, abbreviated to DP).

- 1 Σαρανταπέντε μάστοροι και εξήντα μαθητάδες
- 2 τρεις χρόνους εδουλεύανε της 'Αρτας το γιοφύρι.
- 3 Ολημερίς εχτίζανε κι από βραδί γκρεμιέται.
- 4 Μοιριολογούν οι μάστορες και κλαιν οι μαθητάδες:
- 5 "Αλίμονο στους κόπους μας, κρίμα στες δούλεψές μας,
- 6 ολημερίς να χτίζομε, το βράδυ να γκρεμιέται."
- 7 Και το στοιχειό 'ποκρίθηκεν απ' τη δεξιά καμάρα:
- 8 "Αν δε στοιχειώσεται άνθρωπο, τοίχος δε θεμελιώνει"
- 9 και μη στοιχειώσεται ορφανό, μη ξένο, μη διαβάτη,
- 10 παρά του πρωτομάστορα την ώρα τη γυναίκα,
- 11 πόρχεται αργά τ' αποταχιά, πόρχεται αργά στο γιόμα."

Compare:

- 1 Σαρανταπέντε Κυριακές και εξηντα δύο Δευτέρες
Forty-five Sundays and sixty-two Mondays (DP 1, p. 65)

Σαρανταπέντε λεμονιές (στον άμμο φυτεμένες)
Forty-five lemon-trees planted in the sand (DP 2, p. 97)

(να σου χαρίσω τα φλουριά,) εξηντα δύο ρουμπιέδες
for me to give you the florins, sixty-two gold coins (DP 2, p. 46)
- 2 Τρεις χρόνοι επερπάτησα για 'ν' όμορφο κορίτσι
For three years I've walked [to find] a beautiful girl (DP 2, p. 64)
..... στην Αραπιάς το κάμιο
- 3 Από μακριά τους χαιρετά, και από κοντά τους λέει
From afar she greets them and from afar she says to them (present song, line 21)
- 4 Αντάριασάνε τα βουνά, συννέφιασαν οι κάμποι
The mountains were stormgirt, the plains cloudy (DP 1, p. 195)
- 7 Κι ο δράκοντας 'ποκρίθηκε, (τον τέτοιο λόγο λέει)
and the dragon replied, this is what he said (DP 1, p. 21)
- 9-10 Να μην τα πλύνεις σε ζεστό, ουδέ σε αλισίβα,
παρά με μοσχοσάπουνο, που λούζεις τα μαλλιά σου
And don't wash them in hot [water] nor in alkaline solution,
but with the scented soap [you use] to wash your hair (DP 2, p. 45)

- 11 Δυο το ταχύ, δυο το βραδυ . . . και μια την ώρα 'τούτη
Twice in the morning, twice in the evening and once at this very time (DP 2, p. 45)

Chapter Thirteen

Epic poetry cultures and the use of formula technique: some problems of definition

LAURI HARVILAHTI

This chapter examines the different ways in which the formula technique is used in certain cultures to produce oral poetry and some of the reasons for these differences. My focal point is the concept of tradition-dependence presented by John Miles Foley; in devising an analytic model, however, allowance must be made for the inherent features of an oral poetry tradition. These include the distinctive features of the vernacular, metre and prosody in general, narrative practices, mythical and historical content, in fact anything that is peculiar to a tradition and fundamentally affects its definition.¹ The title of my chapter is broad, and the points made in it attempt to give an overall picture of a few aspects of a wider question. In this examination the illustrative material is drawn from Finnish, Karelian, Russian and South Slav narrative poetry.

The primary metric-poetic elements of the line structure generally provide the performer of a narrative poem with a set of rules, assisting a singer in composing a long narrative poem. But at the same time they also restrict the creative freedom of the singer and act as a model and an aid. There were once (at least when the materials now in the archives were collected) obvious differences in the way in which items were composed in the poetic traditions already mentioned. In most cases where verification is possible, one major difference is the composition of South Slav poems during actual performance; the Finnish poems, on the other hand, changed relatively little from one performance to the next. This also applies to Russian *byliny*, which are freer in their line construction. The reasons for the different mode of composition cannot be attributed solely to the influence of metric-poetic factors.

¹ Foley mentions three concepts that should be borne in mind when comparing poetic traditions. In addition to tradition-dependence he distinguishes genre-dependence by which he means that comparison is satisfactory only if comparability of genre is also taken into account. His third concept is text-dependence. This is the establishment of the status of the text before analysis: i.e. authentically oral, based on oral tradition, recorded at a sung performance, dictated, tape recorded, taken down by hand (John Miles Foley, *Oral-Formulaic Theory and Research. An Introduction and Annotated Bibliography*, New York, London, 1985, pp. 68-70).

Composition in performance or repetition of fixed versions?

Composition in performance appears to be represented in different ways in different poetic cultures. Some performers generally produce relatively fixed entities, while others use contamination methods to compile poems by drawing on traditional devices in relatively free combinations. Finnish, Karelian and Russian narrative poetry normally belongs to the former category, the epic poetry of the South Slavs, especially the Serbs, the Bosnians and the Hercegovinians and numerous Mongol and Turkic peoples mostly to the latter.² The variants of Finnish, Karelian and Russian narrative poems are usually relatively short compared, for example, with the longest variants of the South Slavs and the Mongols, which often run to thousands of lines. There are also differences in the way singers compose their songs. It is possible to distinguish in both the Finnish-Karelian and the Russian tradition areas *conservative singers*, who repeat their poems as more or less fixed entities, *innovative singers*, who show a tendency towards slightly freer and more personal composition, and *compilers*, who weave clearly distinct entities out of the relatively stable poetry elements favoured in their areas. Naturally some singers do not fit into these categories exactly; variation ranges from singers producing and repeating almost fixed versions to 'mixers' who combine at random material from different contexts.

A.M. Astakhova has classified *bylina* singers in northern Russia into three categories according to the extent to which they use improvisation.³

1. Singers who perform their *byliny* exactly (or almost exactly) as they learnt them. According to Astakhova the singers in this category display a strong desire to repeat their *byliny* in the form inherited from previous generations;⁴

² Gatsak uses the term 'small-scale epic' for a type of narrative poetry in which a 'tendency to compose' is almost always absent. He includes in this category epic poetry in the Slav languages, Finnish-Karelian epic poems and the songs of the *Edda*. His other category, 'large-scale epic', applies to poetry whose performers made extensive use of composition in performance. As examples of this kind of epic he cites the traditional poetry of the 'eastern peoples' (probably a reference to those speaking Altaic languages) and the Bosnian Muslims (V.M. Gatsak, 'Osnovy ustnoj epicheskoj poetiki slavjan', in *Istorija, kul'tura, etnografija i fol'klor slavjanskikh narodov. IX mezhdunarodny s'ezd slavistov*, Kiev, Moscow, 1983, pp. 190, 195). Nekljudov provides an interesting picture of the Mongol poetry tradition; the number of lines in an epic can vary from a thousand to more than twenty thousand among certain peoples (S.Ju. Nekljudov, *Geroicheskiy epos mongol'skikh narodov*, Moscow, 1984, pp. 83-86). According to Foley the songs collected by Vuk Karadžić do not show precisely the same dynamics as the Muslim songs recorded by Parry and Lord. The Karadžić songs are shorter and more focused; in many cases they appear to be easier to commit to memory (see Foley, Ch. 8).

³ A.M. Astakhova, *Byliny Severa*, 1, Moscow, Leningrad, 1938, pp. 70-85.

⁴ In debating Astakhova's category Vesterholt argues that verbatim repetition is a

2. Singers who use a fixed general framework as the basis for producing poems and fill it with stereotype episodes. In most cases the resulting entity, consisting of a general framework and episodes, assumes a relatively fixed form, as a result of which little variation occurs from one performance to another.

3. The third category consists of improvisers who produce clearly varied versions of their *byliny* at each performance. While they use composition techniques similar to those of singers in the second category, instead of forming relatively unvarying entities, they compile their poems anew at each performance.

Research into Russian *bylina* poetry has shown that by far the most common ways of producing *byliny* have been Astakhova's categories 1 and 2. Patricia Arant's claim that Russian and South Slav epic poetry belong to the same composition type probably arises from her conclusion that conspicuous use of formulas in Russian *bylina* poetry was an indication that *bylina* singers generally used an *oral formula technique* similar to that of the South Slav *guslari*. However, this has not necessarily been the case, and certainly not in the period in which the surviving *bylina* texts were recorded. It should be stressed here that an attempt on the part of the singer to reproduce established versions does not mean that these versions have been memorized word for word as entities. Comparison of extensive Russian material from a number of singers usually shows minor variation from one performance to the next in the choice of words and word order, and also in formulas and imagery.⁵

To draw a line between Astakhova's first and second categories requires information about when, where and from whom the poetic material was learnt, the number of variants recorded from the same singer, analysis of the singer families, age-group and local tradition. Study of the Finnish-Karelian tradition could, for example, begin with

recent phenomenon that has spread as people have learnt to read and write. Thus the singers who aim at exact repetition are those who are literate (this was the case in the examples cited by Astakhova) and have lost immediate touch with the purely oral tradition. Literacy and the opportunity to consult the texts of earlier recordings influence a singer's perception of fixity. Vesterholt argues that the literate singer will inevitably try to learn a text by heart and similarly commit to memory any formulations of his own: in such circumstances being fixed comes to mean being identical (Ole Vesterholt, *Tradition and Individuality*, Copenhagen, 1973, pp. 77-78).

⁵ Patricia Arant, *Formulaic Style and the Russian Bylina*, Indiana Slavic Studies, The Hague, 1967, p. 45; Astakhova, pp. 70-89; Vesterholt, pp. 77-79. Although Gatsak's criticism of the oral-formula theory is unfounded, he presents useful illustrations of the principles underlying the generation of epic poetry in Russian (Gatsak, pp. 184-95). Chicherov reports that the repertoires of the singers he has studied show the influence of a particularly outstanding singer, although he stresses that this does not prevent variation or inhibit the production of individual versions of the poems; Chicherov makes this latter point with particular reference to the repertoire of T.G. Rjabinin, a singer whose work was also analysed by Arant (V.I. Chicherov, *Shkoly skazitelej Zaonezh'ja*, Moscow, 1982, pp. 39, 52, 54).

comparisons of singer families; Paul Kiparsky's starting point was in comparing variants of the same motifs used by different generations of certain families of singers (the Perttunens, Malinens, Gostja Ondreinens and Iivana Gostjanens). He observed the following:

1. the repertory of Finnish-Karelian singers is made up of relatively fixed compositions. Even variants recorded from the same singers at intervals of decades resembled one another far more than the different versions of any single poem obtained by Milman Parry and Albert Lord from South Slav singers. Variation occurs in vocabulary and word order, sometimes with the replacement of individual words by synonyms;
2. versions produced by sons often differ in many vital respects from those of their fathers, showing that singers did not copy their predecessors verbatim;
3. according to Kiparsky, singers have at their disposal very little unconnected thematic material that can be freely incorporated at suitable points in the narrative such as descriptions of battles or preparations for them. Each event is unique and most epic verses are attached to a specific poem.⁶ Kiparsky's first and second observations would place Finnish-Karelian epic in Astakhova's second category.

Similar observations have also been made by Matti Kuusi. In an analysis of the repertoire of the Ingrian singer Maria Luukka, he noted that in her youth she was an innovative performer with a talent for constructing new entities out of familiar elements, but that later in life she came to respect the tradition and to reproduce the fixed form of a poem. Although she forgot old elements and learnt new ones, she tried to preserve her core repertoire unchanged over the decades. Kuusi also concluded that some poems were treated differently in this respect: her materials ranged from relatively crystallized poems to ones relatively susceptible to improvisation.⁷ A process of repertoire-building of this kind may explain the fixed poetic entities of the numerous singers of traditional Baltic-Finnish trochaic tetrametric poetry.

Astakhova's third category, improvisers, is by far the most interesting, because it provides a point of comparison with the South Slav mode of composition. The best-known examples of users of improvisatory composition in the song areas of northern Russia are M.S. Krjukova and P. Shchegolënok. Both had a gift for compiling poems that diverged from the schemes familiar in their areas. Astakhova mentions that in successive performances Krjukova processed two different endings to the *bylina* 'Dobrynya and Alësha'. While they

⁶ Paul Kiparsky, 'Oral Poetry: Some Linguistic and Typological Considerations', in B. Stolz, R. Shannon (eds), *Oral Literature and the Formula*, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1976, pp. 95-96; Felix J. Oinas, 'Venäläiset bylinat ja suomalainen kertomarunous', in Lauri Honko (ed.), *Kalevala ja maailman eepokset*, Pieksämäki, 1987, pp. 234-35 [*Kalevalaseuran vuosikirja*, 65].

⁷ Matti Kuusi, *Maria Luukan laulut ja loitsut*, Mikkeli, 1983, pp. 181-84.

used established formulas common in the local tradition, at each performance they differed so greatly that only a few lines bore any close resemblance.⁸ Similar examples can also be found in Finnish-Karelian epic poetry. Among the best-known singers in this category were Sohvonja Simanainen and Ellessei Valjokainen. Versions sung by them, differing from the normal local versions yet nevertheless fully in line with the conventions of traditional Baltic-Finnish poetry, are to be found under 'miscellaneous formations' in the published thirty-three-volume corpus *Suomen Kansan Vanhat Runot* (Ancient Poems of the Finnish People, Helsinki, 1980-48), or are contemptuously called 'fabrications'. This category of composers also includes Martiska Karjalainen, a singer with a gift for improvisation. Compilers are clearly in the minority, both in the Russian and the Finnish-Karelian areas. There may, however, have been singers freer in their compositions than we know (or at least singers capable of free composition), for collectors preferred to record singers who kept to the fixed, 'correct' versions.⁹

Thus we may assume that an art of free composition similar to that so common among the South Slavs and Mongol and Turkic singers was known both in the Finnish-Karelian and the Russian tradition areas, though it was not so common. Why, therefore are some specific methods of composition more common than others? The differences between the poetic devices used or the division into 'small-scale' and 'large-scale' epic do not provide a full explanation.

Among the features of epic poems (and indeed of oral tradition in general) is a tendency to preserve the linguistic and poetic conventions that have become familiar and primary in the community, and also to produce folklore tied to the history, social development and cultural conditions of the community (i.e. tradition-ecological factors).¹⁰ Kiparsky has suggested that the differences encountered in the Finnish-Karelian and the South Slav production of epics spring from the difference in the poems' cultural role. Finnish-Karelian poetry clearly contains mythical and ritual elements, whereas South Slav poetry had the function more of a time-passing entertainment. According to Kiparsky, this would explain why the changes in vocabulary and content are avoided in the Finnish-Karelian materials, a feature comparable with the consistency of behaviour in cosmogonical rites and ritual acts performed to ensure a good harvest and the other essentials of human existence.¹¹ There are persuasive reasons for assuming that traditional Finnish-Karelian epic poems were once sung as part of ritual activities.

⁸ Astakhova, op. cit., p. 186; Vesterholt, pp. 35-36.

⁹ Kiparsky, op. cit., pp. 97-98.

¹⁰ Lauri Honko, 'Four Forms of Adaptation of Tradition', *Studia Fennica*, 26, 1981, pp. 28-32.

¹¹ Kiparsky, op. cit., pp. 98-99; Oinas, op. cit., p. 235.

The lack of a large body of conclusive evidence is explained by the fact that such practices were losing their central role by the time of the most active period of poetry collection in the nineteenth century.¹² Furthermore, a significant proportion of Finnish-Karelian poetry belongs to the non-mythical class of heroic poetry or lyric-epic poetry.

K.V. Chistov stresses that Finnish-Karelian and Russian epic poetry belong to different evolutionary strata. Some Finnish-Karelian poetry has features of an archaic, mythical stratum, whereas the most primitive features of the Russian *bylina* have for the most part been replaced by motifs of historical origin.¹³ Most Russian *byliny* are about events that took place in ancient Kiev, some reflect warlike events in the days of Mongol power; sometimes an older stratum based on myth can be discerned in the background. Finnish poems (with the exception of certain 'historical songs') do not have any obvious links with major events in any important historical period, though some may have connections with Viking activities. This helps to explain why so little borrowing occurred between Russian and Finnish-Karelian epic poetry, but it does not explain why both traditions most often produce versions of fixed form.

At the height of the nineteenth-century poetry collection movement the performers of both Finnish-Karelian and Russian oral tradition were mostly peasants living in remote regions, supporting themselves by hunting, fishing, primitive agriculture and itinerant occupations. Their faith was Russian Orthodoxy and often (especially in the tradition areas of Russian Karelia and northern Russia) they were Old Believers. The art of singing was still common in the nineteenth century and to some extent remained so in the present century, although active professional singing of heroic and mythical songs was dying out. The Finnish-Karelian and Russian singers did not have in their immediate environment such real and close analogies with the events of which they sang as the South Slavs. For the Finns, Karelians and Russians there was a kind of empty space in oral poetry during which the 'tradition of the fathers' was repeated, was regarded as sacred and was not therefore noticeably modernized. The cultivation of relatively fixed versions had presumably become a norm maintained by singers and listeners alike.¹⁴

¹² *Suomen Kansan Vanhat Runot* [hereafter SKVR], Vol. 1, Helsinki, 1908, Poem 88b, p. 158.

¹³ K.V. Chistov, *Venäläinen perinnekulttuuri*, Hämeenlinna, 1976, pp. 162-95.

¹⁴ Kirk proposed the following four-stage 'career' for the functional life of oral tradition: originative, creative, reproductive, degenerate (Geoffrey S. Kirk, *The Songs of Homer*, Cambridge, 1962, p. 96). Close adherence to such a concept leads to conclusions reminiscent of earlier theories on the origins of oral tradition advanced by evolutionists. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note examples among north Russian *bylina*-singing families of the gradual stabilization of tradition in successive generations. The best example of this is the Rjabinin family. While the oldest member of the family, T. G. Rjabinin, was able to produce different versions of his *byliny*, the versions produced by the following generations attempted to

In contrast, South Slav epic poetry experienced a dynamic, productive period that continued well into the twentieth century.¹⁵ South Slav narrative poetry used far more motifs than, for example, Russian *byliny*.¹⁶ The main reasons for this were the obvious points of comparison and analogies with the contents of the old poems adopted in recent and older historical periods: the uprisings of 1804-13 and 1815-17, the constant resistance to Turkish rule, events in which the singers themselves had taken part, sometimes actively, sometimes watching from the sidelines. Constant hostilities with occupying forces, conflict between different sections of the population, social, cultural and economic heterogeneity all helped to strengthen the vitality of impulsive, improvisation poetry. This situation also inspired a large number of new epic songs. Narrative poetry did not stagnate: it was in constant use in a productive form adapting to new situations.¹⁷

The formulaic aspect of Finnish oral poetry

The fact that Finnish-Karelian narrative poems were presumably performed as relatively crystallized, lasting entities does not, however, exclude the use of formulas. In other words, the fact that the oral-formula technique of composition familiar to the South Slav epic was not used in performance does not exclude the role of formula technique as a basis for creating poems. Kiparsky has suggested that Finnish-Karelian singers had at their disposal very little unattached thematic material that could be incorporated freely at any suitable point in the narrative. He noted a lack of standard episodes for describing battle, the forging of weapons, or preparation for battle. Kiparsky also adds that every event is unique in poetry and most epic verses belong to a particular song.¹⁸

Different options have also been put forward. Jouko Hautala wrote in his doctoral thesis in 1945:

The composer of a poem must first have a subject, secondly a tool in the form of a poetic metre, here conceived of in such broad terms that it includes all the traditional artistic means belonging to a particular type of poem ... It is only natural that the composer of a folk poem unsuspectingly and without more ado selects from his stock of lines and complete stanzas any material that seems suited to his poem ... Carried to extremes, this procedure means that existing stanzas can be used to construct entirely new logical entities, poems, using existing episodes like building blocks.¹⁹

reproduce his verbatim (Astakhova, op. cit., pp. 71-76).

¹⁵ Albert B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, 7th impression, New York, 1976, pp. 14-17.

¹⁶ Vesterholt, op. cit., p. 45.

¹⁷ For a comprehensive account of the performance context in South Slav tradition see Svetozar Koljević, *The Epic in the Making*, Oxford, 1980, pp. 215-321.

¹⁸ Kiparsky, op. cit., pp. 95-96; Oinas, op. cit., p. 235.

¹⁹ Jouko Hautala, *Lauri Lappalaisen runo*, Helsinki, 1945, pp. 15-16; Hautala, 'Über Arbeitsweise und Möglichkeiten bei der Erforschung altfinnischer Runendichtung', *Studia Fennica*, 5, 1947, p. 40. Hautala does not refer to Parry's work. Outi

In dealing with these 'existing episodes' Hautala wrote: 'It is a well-known fact that certain stereotype poetic images exist that can be used in the most varied of contexts; the field covered by such stereotype images can, at least in theory, be extended to comprise all poetry.'²⁰ In commenting on Hautala's ideas Kuusi stresses that some lines occur in a particular context ('fixed features'), while others ('clichés' or 'loose features') have no such context. Kuusi treated these categories separately in his analysis, pointing out that numerous borderline cases do nevertheless occur.²¹

Formula families

There are, however, certain formulas in which the concept of sameness can be extended beyond mere similarity of metre and vocabulary. In traditional Finnish-Karelian poetry some distinct categories of structural formulas can be identified and we often encounter cases that call to mind the 'allomorphs' and their 'families' generated on the basis of the preverbal Gestalt.²² The line *taoit enne, taoit egle* (you forged once, you forged in bygone days) used as a formula in west Ingrian poetry is characteristic of poems telling of either the origin of the world or of the birth of the *kantele*. In both cases it belongs to a similar episode in which a smith is requested to make a magic tool or musical instrument (the *kantele*). As we can see, the formula relies on repetition of the verb in exactly the same form at the beginning of parallel half-lines. The second components of the half-lines, *enne/egle* (once/in bygone days), are furthermore analogically parallel adverbs indicating past time. Numerous formulas and formula-like expressions are based on similar construction. The identical repetition of the verb at the beginning of the parallel halves of a four-word line can link all kinds of lines:

Takoi niitä, takoi näitä	He forged these, he forged those
Antoi niitä, antoi näitä	He gave these, he gave those
Tappo nuoret, tappo vanhat	Killed the young, killed the old
Käytti piispat, käytti papit	Came the bishops, came the priests
Etsin Suomet, etsin saaret	I sought Finland, I sought the islands
Kylpi Untoi, kylpi Ventoi	Untoi bathed, Ventoi bathed
Niiti kaislat, niiti ruo'ot	Cut the reeds, cut the rushes
Ajoi virssan, ajoi toisen	Drove a verst, drove another
Kasvoi vuoen, kasvoi toisen	Grew a year, grew another
Taittoi luuan, taittoi toisen	Made a broom, made another

Lehtipuro, 'Trends in Finnish Folkloristics', *Studia Fennica*, 18, 1974, pp. 16-18).

²⁰ Hautala, *Lauri Lappalaisen runo*, 1945, p. 16.

²¹ See Matti Kuusi, *Sampo-epos*, Helsinki, 1949, p. 108. Hautala and Kuusi differ widely in their views. In this context it should be mentioned that the poem 'Lauri Lappalainen' analysed by Hautala comprised an unusually high number of itinerant stock themes. Numerous scholars have drawn attention to the phenomenon of materials with a definite association to a particular poem or narrative entity being freely placed within that poem or narrative.

²² Michael A. Nagler, *Spontaneity and Tradition: a Study in the Oral Art of Homer*, Berkeley, 1974, pp. 5-12.

Huusi kerran, huusi toisen

Gave a shout, gave another

Formulas such as these are used in countless poems. The line *takoi niitä, takoi näitä* (forged these, forged those), for example, occurs in poems about a golden bride, the courting of maidens on an island and the courtship of the sun and moon. Such formulas come from different types of contexts in which their function is, by using parallel comparison, to indicate a large quantity of some property or phenomenon by synonym (reeds/rushes), analogy (Finland/island) or antithesis (the young/the old), or by using *toinen* (other) in place of a parallel concept.

The list could be continued. The same basic construction (Verb + X, Verb + X) can also occur in a form in which exact repetition of the verb is substituted by another verb close in meaning and observing the conventions of traditional Finnish-Karelian parallelism:

Souva laivoi, jouva laivoi

Row boat, hurry boat

Puri puuta, söi kivee

Bit wood, ate stone

Virui viiko, sai nätälä

A week passed, seven days went by

It is also possible for the narrative to be carried forward in the second half of the line:

Synty tyttö, kasvo tyttö

A girl was born, the girl grew

Katsoi lapsen, kaivoi silmän

Watched the child, rubbed the eyes

The creation of poems is not tied to the parts of speech, nor even to syntactical constructions. Thus the same principle as that outlined above is used to form a broad formula family without these formulas being of identical linguistic structure. The central principle is that a line has four words and is divided into two halves. A word is repeated either in exactly the same form at the beginning of parallel half-lines or a parallel word is used. The other components in the half-lines are in most cases analogical or antithetical concepts. Sometimes there is identical repetition:

Pronoun + noun / pronoun + noun

Kelle tyttö, kelle poika

To whom a girl, to whom a boy

Kelle etso, kulle etso

To whom a search, to which one a search

Pronoun + verb / pronoun + verb

Mitä lauloin, kuta lauloin

What I sang, which one I sang

Sillä syötti, sillä juotti

She gave this to eat, she gave this to drink

Adverb + noun / adverb + noun

Mihi neito, kuhu neito

Whither the maid, whither the maid

Siellä madot, siellä toukat

There the worms, there the grubs

This is just one example of the numerous formula families that occur in Finnish-Karelian traditional poetry. At the level of structural or

generative formulas we may, like Hautala, claim that such formulas can be applied to all traditional Finnish-Karelian poetry. But can we define the formula for traditional Finnish-Karelian epic?

We may, following Joseph Russo, propose that most definitions of formula are right in their own way and reflect some fact, some level regularity about the phenomenon in question.²³ It is indeed possible to define the concept of formula by resorting to various criteria and emphasizing various factors ranging from the phonetic and rhythmic to the semantic levels. It is always possible that the definition may act as a condition for selection — in other words, for seeking items for analysis thought to be relevant to the study. What is found depends on the questions to which the material is subjected. It is probably a level of analysis which requires sociolinguists, psycholinguists, folklorists and cognitive psychologists to join forces.²⁴ Even this is possibly not enough and we may need to add literary scholars and cultural historians. Even this co-operation would probably not produce a completely satisfactory or reliable understanding of how oral poetry really is produced, its function in society and how it differs from other forms of culture, such as written poetry.

Standard sequences

Lord, drawing on relatively scant materials (three individual variants on different motifs sung by three singers), discovered features and repeated sequences that remain the same in different versions of the same theme. Having examined his examples he claimed that keeping to a fixed text does not produce such versions; what it does produce are repeated sequences adapted to the context of the poem being sung.²⁵

A good example of a standard sequence attached to many poetic motifs is the description of how the Finnish hero Väinämöinen, built himself a boat. This serves as the introduction to poems about a voyage, the search for timber to make a boat, a wooing contest, a visit to an ancient shaman long dead and buried, a visit to the otherworld and the *Sampo* poems (the construction, theft and loss of a magic device that brings its owner wealth and power). The opening theme usually describes how Väinämöinen was building his boat by the performance of magic spells, but came to a halt when he noticed that a few words (spells) were missing:

²³ Joseph A. Russo, 'Is "Oral" or "Aural" the Cause of Homer's Formulaic Style?', in Stolz, Shannon, op. cit., p. 35.

²⁴ Bruce A. Rosenberg, 'Oral Literature in the Middle Ages', in *Oral Traditional Literature: a Festschrift for Albert Bates Lord*, John Miles Foley (ed.), Columbus, Ohio, 1980, pp. 447-48.

²⁵ Albert B. Lord, 'Kalevala, eteläslaavien epiikka ja Homeros', in Honko, *Kalevala ja maailman eepokset*, op. cit., pp. 249-51.

Oli vanha Väinämöinen,
tietäjä ijän ikuine
teki tiijolla venettä,
laittoi purtta laulamalla;
uupui kolmea sanaa,
peähän purren peästäksensä
parraspuita pannessaha.

Once old Väinämöinen
sage eternal, very ancient
made a boat out of wisdom
shaped a vessel by singing
three words were missing
in finishing the end of the vessel
in making the gunnel.²⁶

Väinämöinen sets off to find the words, either from the long-dead Antero Vipunen, or from the otherworld, or sometimes from some other difficult place, such as a pike's head, a salmon's mouth, a swan's feathers or the top of a deer's head. The 'seer's-skills' theme is thus a fixed sequence typically used to begin a poem; it sets the scene and sets in motion the events proper.

An example of how a theme is adapted to different contexts is the poem about Väinämöinen's knee-wound, in which Väinämöinen strikes his knee with an axe as he builds his boat and sets off to find someone to stanch the bleeding. Here the boat building is not a performance of magic but a portrayal of a craftsman at work:

Itse vanha Väinämöini
vesti vuorella venehtä,
loati purtta kallivolla,
ei kirves kivehen koske,
eikä karska kallivohe;
kirves liuskahti lihahe,
Väinämöisen varpahase
Polvehe pojan pätöisen.

Old Väinämöinen himself
built a boat on a mountain
made a vessel on a rock
the axe did not strike the stone
did not crunch on the rock
the axe slipped into his flesh
in Väinämöisen's toe
in the poor boy's knee.²⁷

The alliteration using 't' in the third line of the previous example is replaced here by *v*: *teki tiijolla venettä / vesti vuorella venettä*; the word *laulamalla* (by singing) is replaced by *kallivolla* (on the rock). The frame of the opening is, however, basically the same: Väinämöinen building a boat. Moreover, it is quite common for lines belonging in principle to different poetic contexts to occur in a single motif. Thus one variant about Väinämöinen's wound begins:

Tuopa vanha Väinämöini,
vesti vuorella venehtä,
kallivolla kalkutteli,
luati purtta laulamalla

That old Väinämöinen
built a boat on a mountain
beat it on a rock
made a vessel by singing²⁸

A poem about a visit to the otherworld, which is usually accompanied by the magical construction of a boat, begins in a few variants in the manner already familiar from the wound poem:

²⁶ SKVR, Poem 393, lines 1-7, p. 507; cf. Poem 42, lines 1-7, p. 62.

²⁷ Ibid., Poem 306, lines 1-8, p. 411.

²⁸ Ibid., Poem 304, lines 1-4, p. 406.

Vaka vanha Väinämöinen
ulkoinen umannon sulho
veisti vuorella venettä
kalliolla kalkutteli

Sturdy old Väinämöinen
distant bridegroom from Umanto
built a boat on a mountain
beat it on a rock ²⁹

We could, of course, speculate which motif this opening suits most naturally, but the poetic material itself proves that such a question is futile. Since it is impossible to delve into the nebulous history of a poem in search of an 'original' form, the most reasonable explanation must be that as singers developed their own versions of themes, they made use of line sequences commonly encountered in tradition, some of which served conveniently to set the scene for several plot constructions, or to describe different sets of events, while other sequences — though fewer — provided contentual entities.

²⁹ Ibid., Poem 353, lines 1-4, p. 457.

PART FOUR

MANIPULATION OF TRADITION

Chapter Fourteen

Primus inter pares: why was Vuk Karadžić the most influential folklore scholar in South-Eastern Europe in the nineteenth century?

VILMOS VOIGT

Vuk Stefanović Karadžić was born in Tršić on 6 November 1787 and died in Vienna on 7 February 1864. He began publishing Serbian folk songs as early as 1814, collected Serbian folklore from as early as 1814, lived in Vienna from 1813 until his death, visited Russia as early as 1819 and Germany as early as 1823. He initiated not only Serbian, but also Montenegrin and Dalmatian folklore research, and was a philologist of wide-ranging interests whose work encompassed literature, linguistics and cultural history. He was also a social and religious reformer, he harboured political ambitions and was a fervent patriot. His life spans the central years of an important period in European oral tradition research which lasted for more than a century. Karadžić's importance both for Serbia, and on a larger scale for the former Yugoslavia, for the South Slavs and other Balkan peoples, and even for South-Eastern Europe, or rather Eastern Europe in general, is beyond any doubt. To understand fully the exceptional position of Karadžić in his own day we need only compare his life and work with that of other East European scholars who initiated oral tradition studies in the nineteenth century. It is in this context that he was *primus inter pares*. By the same token, close examination of his life and work also illuminates the early development of interest in the study of oral tradition elsewhere in Eastern Europe.¹

The great collections

The formative period of European oral tradition study runs from about the last thirty years of the eighteenth century to the last thirty years of the nineteenth. Of course it is a question of taste and choice to identify the key forerunners, initiators, central figures and latecomers during

¹ The *Sabrana dela Vuka Karadžića* edition of Karadžić's works has been used in this chapter (for bibliography see volume XXXVI, Belgrade, 1974). Current research on Karadžić can readily be followed by reference to *Naučni sastanak slavista u Vukove dane* (Belgrade).

that span of one hundred years.² However, few scholars would dispute the names of those I shall include in the following survey, however much they might regret certain absences.

In 1760, *Fragments of Ancient Poetry Collected in the Highlands of Scotland, and Translated from the Galic or Erse Language* was published in Edinburgh. The success drove the 'anonymous translator', James Macpherson, to publish in 1762 and 1765 the 'ancient' poems of the alleged ancient bard, Ossian. It is important to mention that although the books appeared in English, the 'original' tradition was Scottish Gaelic, i.e. from beyond the boundaries of modern (English) civilization, purportedly originating from the tradition of the ordinary yet noble and heroic common people.

Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, a three-volume collection of English and Scottish ballads, was first published in London in 1765 (the same year as the complete edition of *Ossian*). In the introduction to the first volume Percy observes that the old minstrel ballads have a 'romantic wildness' and manifest a kind of national character. Based upon old manuscripts and broadside publications the whole collection was considered as a testimony of both the English and the Scottish tradition, and even included references to Ossian (i.e. a Gaelic minstrel). Heroic epics and lyrical sentiments were inseparably connected both by the editor and in the minds of the audience. As is well-known, *Ossian* and Percy's publications jointly exercised an important influence on folklore research in Europe throughout the following century.

However, it was neither from England nor Scotland that the next generation of folklore scholars received their main inspiration, but from German sources. German literature, philology and even philosophy incorporated a national (sometimes nationalist) and an international comparative attitude to tradition. Johann Gottfried Herder's *Volkslieder* of 1778-79 (renamed after the 1808 edition as *Stimmen der Völker in Liedern*) includes the ballads and fragments of heroic songs performed by various peoples all over the world (including the South Slavs) and advances the author's idea that popular poetry was characterized by distinctive local 'national' qualities and features. In Eastern Europe the significance of Herder's views grew after the publication of the enlarged 1808 version of the collection. Herder's egalitarianism and cosmopolitanism permeated the new edition;

² For an overview of the history of folklore research in Europe see Giuseppe Cocchiara, *The History of Folklore in Europe*, Philadelphia, 1981, which contains some reference to Eastern Europe. In the 1970s the concept of the 'mental history' of European oral tradition enjoyed some popularity among scholars in Western Europe. In general, the scholars who wrote about this idea were not specialists in the tradition of Eastern Europe. An exception was Peter Burke, whose *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (London, 1978) takes into account the work of folklorists in Eastern Europe, particularly that of Karadžić.

the 'peoples' (*Völker*) of the first edition were elevated to 'nations' and his lack of condescension in handling Slav materials was enthusiastically approved among Slavophiles throughout the nineteenth century.

The other main source of German ideas in European oral tradition study came from the activities and voluminous output of the Grimm brothers. After important preliminary studies they published between 1812 and 1814 their edition of *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, followed in 1816-18 by the first edition of their collection of tales, *Deutsche Sagen*; their major work, *Deutsche Mythologie*, a comparative study which sought in classical tradition points of contact and explanations for German myths, appeared in 1835. Each of these works was quickly recognized as a basic source of reference by folklorists throughout Europe, a fact attested in the Grimm brothers' extensive correspondence (the correspondence itself is in effect a concise history of early folklore research in Europe).³

Another source of German inspiration, that of Wilhelm Mannhardt (1831-80), came too late for Karadžić. Growing out of the Grimms' approach to mythology, his mythological interpretation of ritual and folk customs, as exemplified in his *Wald- und Feldkulte* (1875-77), served as a starting point for the next generation of comparative folklore scholars in Europe. Having read Jacob Grimm's *Deutsche Mythologie*, Mannhardt tried to shape and motivate the idea of a union of unions of German History and Antiquity (*Gesammtverein der deutschen Geschichts- und Altertumsvereine*), urging the publication of a handbook of source material of folk traditions (*Urkundenbuch der Volksüberlieferungen*). After lecturing on this subject in 1858 he drew up a questionnaire about folk beliefs and customs and circulated it in 1865 to German scholars as well as to folklorists among the neighbouring peoples. Karadžić, an admirer and follower of Herder, and a personal acquaintance of the Grimms, was, of course, a prime first-rank candidate for such a common venture, but was by then already dead. Thus the transition from the technique of folklore collecting used by both Karadžić and the Grimm brothers — i.e. one person taking down word-by-word notes of folk songs, tales and other materials — to a co-ordinated group of collaborators, answering 'anthropological' questions, did not take place in early Serbian folklore research, although somewhat later Serbian researchers into mythology did adopt the ideas and the methods introduced by Mannhardt.

³ The best English versions of the Grimms' tales is *The German Legends of the Brothers Grimm*, ed., trans. Donald Ward, 2 vols, 1981; the editor's introduction provides an account of the brothers' work, though without reference to their East European connections. For a recent biography in German see Ludwig Denecke, *Jacob Grimm und sein Bruder Wilhelm*, Stuttgart, 1971. An annual overview of research and scholarship relating to the Grimms is published in *Brüder Grimm Gedenken* (Marburg); the first volume in this series (1963) contains a brief account by Miljan Mojašević on 'Grimms and Yugoslavia'.

We could go on and list other possible sources of influence on Karadžić dating from the mid-nineteenth century. But this seems less important than to draw a second circle around Karadžić's activity, and to refer to certain comparable attempts to establish the national cultural heritage of the 'smaller' peoples of Eastern Europe. The best example is the history of the Finnish national folk epic, the *Kalevala*, compiled and published by Elias Lönnrot (1802-84). Even if we accept as the shortest time span for the shaping of the *Kalevala* as running from Lönnrot's letters of 1833-34 to the final version of the 'new' *Kalevala* in 1849, it took sixteen years to arrange assorted materials collected from the contemporary folk tradition into a 'national' product. The significance of the *Kalevala* is two-fold. From the mid-nineteenth century on it represented, for Finnish culture, a cornerstone of cultural and national identity; and from the same date it served as a model in shaping similar 'national folklore poems'.

The closest affinity to the Finnish epic is found in the Estonian *Kalevipoeg*, inspired by similar cultural-political forces and drawing often on closely related materials. As literary scholars and folklorists have shown, *Kalevipoeg* was the outcome of an extended period of folk poetry collection in Estonia; it was published in two languages (German and Estonian) by Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald (1803-82) in six parts in Tartu (Dorpat) between 1857 and 1861. In fact publication of *Kalevipoeg* materials began in 1836, just a year after the first edition of the *Kalevala*, when the journal *Das Inland* published a paper by R. Hollmann, 'Beiträge zur estnischen Mythologie', which included a text, probably by Kreutzwald himself, under the title 'The Girl of Vaskjalk Bridge'. In the same year, Kreutzwald wrote in German his ballad 'Kalews Sohn'. It is interesting to note that from the very beginning mythological and poetic values were interwoven with outside influences in the shaping of the Estonian national epic. In his foreword to the 1853 edition (the so-called *Proto-Kalevipoeg*) Kreutzwald forbids future generations to change its (i.e. his) orthography. Evidence of the sources of influence can be found in the preface to the part of the *Kalevipoeg* issued in 1857. It begins with a citation from Jacob Grimm, and in the text he mentions Macpherson, the *Kalevala* and the Grimms' *Deutsche Mythologie*.⁴

Within the north-east Baltic region the Latvian national epic, *Lačplēsis*, *Latvju tautas varonis. Tautas epus. Pēc tautas teikām sacerējis* (1888), by the poet Andrejs Pumpurs (1841-1901) was the outcome of a

⁴ On questions relating to the Finnish *Kalevala* and Estonian *Kalevipoeg* see Lauri Honko (ed.), *Kalevala ja maailman eepokset*, Pieksämäki, 1987 [*Kalevalaseuran vuosikirja*, Vol. 65]; Vilmos Voigt, 'A Kalevala: egy 19. századi nemzeti eposz' [*Nyelvtudományi Közlemények*, Vol. 87, 1985, pp. 418-24]. See my paper 'The Kalevala and the Epic Traditions of Europe', in Honko (ed.), *Religion, Myth and Folklore in the World's Epics. The Kalevala and its Predecessors*, Berlin, New York, 1990, pp. 247-64.

comparable development. It is generally agreed that the poem was modelled on the *Kalevala* and *Kalevipoeg*, and that Pumpurs worked on it for about twenty years. Despite the subtitle 'folk epic' it is more an individual work based on Latvian folklore. Other Latvian patriots and writers of the same time tried to compose Latvian epic songs. The most important of their works and the closest to *Lāčplēsis* are *Staburags un Liesma jeb Veci un jauni laiki* (1869) by Fridrichs Mahlberg (Mālbergis, 1824-1907) and *Čūsku tēvs Zalksis* (1875-76) by Miķelis Auseklis (1850-79), together with fragments of his long epic song, *Dzintarija*. It should be noted that all three Latvian poets (and some of their friends) were directly involved in folklore collecting and publishing. Auseklis published books of Latvian folklore which enjoyed great popularity and Pumpurs wrote a well-formed 'explanation' of his own epic (*Izskaidrojumi par 'Lāčplēsi', atsaucoties uz T. un Lautenbaha kungu kritikām*, 1889) in reply to the factual criticism of the philologist Jēkabs Lautenbahs.

While it is possible that neither the Finn Lönnrot nor the Estonian Kreutzwald was influenced by Karadžić in shaping folk epic tradition, Pumpurs, on the other hand, did have a connection with Serbia. In 1877, after the outbreak of the Russo-Turkish war he joined the Russian volunteer troops in Moscow. He served as a military topographer and then with the Don Cossack troops in Serbia from October 1876 to February 1877. His journey, described in his book *No Daugavas līdz Donavai* (1895), indicated romantic and positive feelings towards Serbia and her people.⁵

In a reverse way, it is also instructive to consider the conscious falsifications of 'folk' epics in the nineteenth century such as the 'old Czech' manuscripts by Vaclav Hanka, in 1817; or literary creations such as the Romanian 'folk epic' by Marian Marienescu (*Novacescii*, written in 1880, published first only in parts); and the famous Armenian folk epic *David Sasuntsi*, collected for the first time in 1874 by G. Servandztyan, which — according to Armenian scholars — might reflect events from the uprising in the Sasun mountain region against the army of the Baghdad Caliph about AD 851, having survived for a millennium in oral tradition, without written variants. Twentieth-century attempts to invent or reconstruct old oral epic poetry are also numerous, in particular among the small Finno-Ugrian peoples, such as the Mordvins, Komi and even the Mansi. Although the data is either earlier or later than the time of Karadžić's activity, it elucidates a widespread aspect of his work: the constant urge to establish or re-establish an heroic past from and in the form of heroic songs as part of the cultural tradition and identity of various East European peoples. The creation of 'national' epic from oral tradition material was a major

⁵ The best current edition of *Lāčplēsis* is Ya.Ya. Rudzitis (ed.), *Lāčplēsis-Lačplesis*, Moscow, 1975.

preoccupation of nineteenth-century intellectuals in this part of Europe.

Besides heroic songs, folklore materials may be grouped in other genres. 'Naïve epic' was a much hunted quarry in the nineteenth century, but folklorists — starting out with the Germans — were quick to realize that collecting and publishing other genres might serve national and cultural interests in just the same way. Although the Grimm brothers wrote about the Old Icelandic *Edda* and valued the *Nibelungenlied* highly, they concentrated their collecting activity on tales and legends, proverbs and other genres. In their *Deutsche Mythologie* (1835), in particular, they stressed the importance of fragments of old German or Indo-European mythology which they believed was preserved in tales, legends and ritual. The same collection principle influenced the work of other leading nineteenth-century folklorists, very often a direct result of the Grimm brothers' approach.

Perhaps one of the best examples of this tendency is the work of the Russian folklorist A. N. Afanas'ev (1826-71). He started to collect Russian oral tradition during the 1850s while working at the archive of the Russian Foreign Ministry. A multi-volume publication of Russian folk tales appeared first, *Narodniia russkiye skazki* (1855-64); in 1859 he completed for publication a collection of folk legends, *Narodniia russkiiia legendy*, but censorship prevented its appearing for more than fifty years. His collection of anti-clerical and erotic folk tales and legends, *Zavetniia skazki*, could be published only abroad in Geneva, in an anonymous edition. From the 1850s, Afanas'ev started to write papers on Russian mythology and beliefs, and finally he published a three-volume major work on the 'poetic worldview of the Slavic peoples': *Poeticheskiiia vozzreniia slavian' na prirodu. Opyt sravnitel'nago izucheniiia slavyanskikh predanii i verovanii, v' sviazi s' mificheskimi skazaniiami drugikh rodstvennykh narodov* (1865). The book clearly reflects the thinking and approach of the Grimm brothers, and is the forerunner of the comparative study of Slav mythology and oral tradition — erudite, full of data, but nevertheless often characterized by naïve mythologization. In short, Afanas'ev's book is a legitimate child of its time. Afanas'ev certainly knew about Karadžić's works, and cites his version of the ballad 'The Building of Skadar' from the second volume of *Narodne srpske pjesme* (1823) in illustration of a mythological interpretation of the building sacrifice theme.⁶

An outstanding figure in European folklore research, though practically unknown outside the Baltic countries for reasons of language, is the pioneer of Latvian oral tradition scholarship, Krišjānis Barons (1835-1923). After studies at Tartu University, he became in

⁶ The most recent critical editions of Afanas'ev are Yu.M. Medvedev, B.P. Kirdan (eds), *A.N. Afanas'ev: Drevo zhizni. Izbrannye stats'i*, Moscow, 1982; L.G. Barag, N.V. Novikov (eds), *Narodniia russkiiia skazki A.N. Afanas'eva v trekh tomakh*, I-III, Moscow, 1984-5; A. L. Nalepina (ed.), *A.N. Afanas'ev. Narod-khudozhnik. Mif. Fol'klor. Literatura*, Moscow, 1986.

1863 a co-editor of the first progressive Latvian-language newspaper, *Pēterburgas Avīzes*, and at the same time began to translate into Latvian the 'ancient tale', *Wannem Imanta* (1802), by the German-speaking Latvian writer Garlieb Merkel (Garlibs Merķelis, 1769-1850). From the 1860s he lived in Russia, wintering in Moscow, and from 1878 his major activity became the preparation of a major collection of 217,996 Latvian folk song texts. After moving to Riga in 1894 he and his co-editor, Henrijs Visendorfs, published the collection in six volumes under the title *Latvju dainas* (1894-1915). Latvian folk tales and legends were also published by other folklorists, similarly in breathtaking quantity. Barons' collection is arranged thematically; although 'mythological' songs are included, the collection as a whole is authentic, without unfounded reconstruction or fanciful explanations.⁷

The folklore of the neighbouring peoples, such as the Belarusians, Lithuanians, or even the Russians and Ukrainians is no less, nor inferior to that of the Latvians. An interest in oral tradition research also emerged among these peoples during the second half of the nineteenth century, leading to outstanding collections and publications. This activity is not considered here because for present purposes the work of Barons is adequately representative of how his contemporaries among the neighbouring peoples achieved similar results. However, there is one more parallel, from Poland, that does deserve closer attention. Oskar Kolberg (1814-90), the son of a professor at the University of Warsaw, decided after musical studies to devote his life and work to the collection and publication of Polish oral tradition. His first volume, an anthology of Polish folk songs (*Pieśni ludu polskiego*, 1857), was followed between 1865 and 1890 by a huge forty-volume series entitled *Lud. Jego zwyczaje, sposób życia, mowa, podania, przysłowia, obrzędy, guzta, zabawy, pieśni, muzyka i tańce*. Later arranged on a regional basis, the collection contains some 12,500 songs, 1,250 legends, 2,700 proverbs, 670 tales and various other items of oral tradition. A new, scholarly edition of Kolberg's works, *Dziela wszystkie*, edited by Józef Burszta, will, when completed, run to about a hundred volumes.⁸

In concluding this catalogue of great collectors I want to mention one more example, this time from much further afield. Giuseppe Pitre (1841-1916) practised medicine in the poorer parts of Palermo where his interest was drawn to local Sicilian tradition. Pitre's enthusiasm for the subject led to several monumental publications for which we owe our knowledge of the richness of Sicilian oral tradition. Between 1870 and 1913 he brought out his twenty-five-volume *Biblioteca delle tradizioni popolari siciliane*. In 1882, in collaboration with Salvatore Salomone-Marino, he founded the periodical and bibliographical

⁷ H. Bendiks (ed.), *Krišjāna Barona piemiņai*, Riga, 1962; Kārlis Arājs, *Krišjānis Barons un 'Latvju dainas'*, Riga, 1985.

⁸ See Józef Burszta's introduction and commentaries in *Dziela wszystkie*, Warsaw (1961-).

bulletin, *Archivio per lo studio delle tradizioni popolari*, and in 1885, this time working with another Sicilian folklorist, Gaetano di Giovanni, he founded another periodical, *Curiosità popolari tradizionali*.⁹

The great collectors

It is useful to identify certain common features in nineteenth-century folklore studies. The Scottish, Finnish, Estonian, Latvian, Sicilian, Armenian folklore materials are examples of the cultural heritage of 'small nations'; most commonly this is the only 'cultural heritage' such nations can show to the outside world. The German, Russian and even Polish cases are more complicated. Amongst those peoples a high culture existed, although either it was very weak, or the 'homeland' was not independent, or not unified. Hence the folk tradition is perceived as a common denominator, cultural evidence of a glorious historical past. There is no need to repeat the same observation in respect of Karadžić's Serbian activity. His pan-South-Slav or even pan-Slav affiliations are further examples of the same phenomenon.

All the examples quoted above stem from border areas of Europe. Sicily is situated opposite Africa and the Levant. Finland was a borderland between Protestant, West European Sweden and Orthodox, authoritarian tsarist Russia. Estonia and Latvia were similarly on the crossroads between German and Russian interests. In the case of Poland the situation was similar yet with even more complications as authority shifted from one ruler to another, occasionally resting in Polish hands. It is hardly surprising that for the self-identification of the Armenians at a time when Russian, Turkish or Persian ambitions threatened the well-being of the people, a heroic poem suddenly appears as a most vital tool. Karadžić himself took part in the Serbian uprising against the Turks, and his entire life work was in the service of his homeland.

In the first part of this chapter I listed the first major collections and editions of folklore. In one sense these collections were themselves part of a continuum. From earlier sources we can find materials representing the same genres. Later more exact collections were made more scholarly in approach; local publications added to the total corpus. But the first comprehensive collections remain those I have listed. However great the difference in the degree of authenticity between such works as the *Kalevala*, *Kalevipoeg*, *Lāčplēsis* or *David Sasuntsi*, their value as a cultural criterion is the same: each one represents the first successful attempt to create a 'national epic' and each one provides a model for subsequent works in the same vein.

Hailed as the 'father of modern Serbian culture', Karadžić fits neatly into this context. Nineteenth-century collectors of folklore set about their work at a time when in practically every region of Europe oral tradition still existed, though in varying states of health. Folklorists

⁹ On Pitre see Cocchiara (note 2).

could record folk songs among the Sami, in Switzerland, from Basque fishermen, and in the Hungarian- or German-speaking villages of Transylvania. The number of variants, the diversity of genres and the depth of tradition were, however, very different. Various theories seek to explain why the epic songs, which served as the basic material for the *Kalevala* existed in the 1830s only in some Finnish-Karelian districts; why Estonian oral tradition was less rich in songs; why the Latvians knew practically no epic songs at all; why the Croats and Slovenes, Bulgarians and Greeks had forgotten their heroic songs which are presumed to have existed while both Orthodox Serbs and Muslims from Hercegovina remembered them well? In nineteenth-century Europe there were only a few areas where very rich, traditional folklore was easy to observe and collect.

However, the recording of such tradition depended on the total personal dedication of the collector. To write out the printer's manuscript for fifty bulky volumes, to read the proofs, as Kolberg or Pitřè did, demanded many years of intensive labour. And before that had been the task of finding and assembling the material. Some folklorists had had to travel into remote, primitive areas to meet their informants and to endure living conditions which were spartan at the best of times. Others had had to spend many years poring through boring papers in dusty archives, endlessly copying out their materials. Whether they came from a peasant background or from a professor's family, whether they had received a good formal training or were self-educated amateurs in folklore theory, whether they enjoyed the patronage of the nobility or politicians or had lost their posts because of denunciations, whether they enjoyed a long life and good health or were struck down by illness at a relatively young age, they all had one thing in common: a selfless devotion to the collection of folklore. It is an interesting psychological fact that certain other features of background and character also recur in many of the collectors. Many of them had trained as medical doctors; the study of folklore or literature was initially only a pastime. Happy or unhappy in their family lives, they put their energy into the task of collecting and documenting their own traditional culture. Restless people, who compiled dictionaries, founded temperance societies, became journalists, reformed orthographies, composed operas, assembled bibliographies, translated Homer and travelled as far as China, the Malay Peninsula or Ceylon — they all belong to the same marginal type.

Karadžić could stand as a stereotype of such men: the son of a peasant family, an irregular student; a man of letters, or more precisely a scribe; a volunteer when it came to war, but often ill; hardly able to walk, he still travelled widely; a customs officer, variously alleged to be an Austrian and Russian spy, and for a time President of the Serbian Court of Law; translator of the *New Testament* (paid from Russian sources) and at the same time of the *Code Napoleon*; protagonist and

antagonist of Serbian and other rulers, paid by them, courted by them, but having to wait and fight for his payments, for his entry and exit papers; meeting leading German scholars such as Jacob Grimm, poets such as Goethe, and marrying a non-Serbian girl in Austria.

Folklorists of later generations concentrated on the study of particular genres. It was not unusual for a specialist in one particular genre to work on other genres. For much of the nineteenth century, however, folklore study was typically still multi-generic, a characteristic illustrated by the major nineteenth-century publications. Lönnrot's *Kalevala* includes epic songs, wedding songs, laments, charms, numerous proverbs, legends and religious poetry. The Grimm brothers paved the way for combined study of folk tales, legends, beliefs and customs. Kolberg, an eminent authority on folk music also published tales, riddles and even ethnographic descriptions. There is hardly any field of folklore and folk life research left untouched by Pitrè: from folk medicine to erotic folklore, from folk religion to witchcraft.

Karadžić's *oeuvre* is an exemplary illustration of the nineteenth-century polymath. His grammar, dictionary, literary criticism, historical studies and translations form an outer circle around the core of ethnographic and tradition interests. He collected, studied and published folk tales, to some extent legends, riddles and proverbs. His collections of folk songs span the whole domain of sung folklore: heroic epic, wedding songs, women's and men's poetry. He paid close attention to the descriptions of folk customs and the life of the people. A general and generalizing approach is characteristic of his works, e.g. *Montenegro und die Montenegriner* (1837), *Kovčežić za istoriju, jezik i običaje Srba sva tri zakona* (1849), and those published posthumously, e.g. *Život i običaji naroda srpskoga* (1867) and *Skupljeni istoriski i etnografski spisi* (1898).

In Eastern Europe the life of the great nineteenth-century folklorists was overshadowed by the constant struggle for money, secure employment, the opportunity to collect and thereafter to print one's manuscripts: in short for funds and patrons, and very often in vain. Archives are full of letters from folklorists asking for jobs or money or both in support of fieldwork and publication. A Pumpurs or an Afanas'ev knew what it was to be left without money or employment. Lönnrot and Kolberg gave up the professions for which they had trained in order to undertake their studies and in later years, in spite of their fame, they often set off on their fieldwork trips with only the most meagre resources. Constructing a national identity was not a lucrative occupation in nineteenth-century Eastern Europe, as Karadžić found to his cost. When he did obtain money through Kopitar's help from the Vienna court, from Prince Miloš of Serbia, from Prince-Bishop Njegoš of Montenegro, or from the Academy of Sciences in St Petersburg, it was still a most troublesome task to ensure the regular flow of funds

and to please his sponsors without betraying his identity, or his real plans and material. But like so many of his fellow East European folklorists, Karadžić mastered the task and succeeded in finding the necessary support for living, working, collecting and printing. In spite of constant complaints about the insurmountable difficulties in the way of their work, the great nineteenth-century East European folklorists did carry on their research, over periods of many years, and their printed collections surpass in quantity all those of later generations. Looking back we can only wonder how those men working on their own, without any of the research facilities at the disposal of scholars today, such as research institutes and libraries, grants and assistants, were able to achieve so much. For all the thousands of pages that were printed, however, many more remain as manuscripts in public and private archives — the unseen fruit of a golden age of early folklore research in Eastern Europe.

Vuk Karadžić: an appraisal

I have outlined some of the most pertinent reasons for presenting Karadžić as a typical representative of his age, a *primus inter pares*. In approaching Karadžić's life and work in this way, it also becomes easier to understand why he stands above his contemporaries: a *primus inter pares*. Reviewing the data already presented, Karadžić ranks as *primus*, first, in the narrow sense of the word: he was the first great figure to collect East European folklore. His first two books, *Mala prostonarodnja slaveno-serbska pjesnarica* (1814) and *Narodna srbska pjesnarica* (1815) were published thirty years before any comparable works. The Grimms published their first work on tales in 1812 and by 1815 Karadžić had already begun to work on his own collection which was published under the title *Narodne srpske pripovijetke* in 1821. Hungarian collections appeared shortly afterwards with Georg Gaal's *Märchen der Magyaren* in 1822 and Johann Mailáth's *Magyarische Sagen und Märchen* in 1825.¹⁰ It was the 1840s before Czech, Slovak, Transylvanian, Saxon and Romanian collections appeared, while the first volume of Afanas'ev's Russian tales came out in 1855. Karadžić's collection of 1821 was also of particular significance from another point of view. Translated into German by his wife (*Volksmärchen der Serben*, 1854) and with a preface by Jacob Grimm, it was the first and only significant collection of oral tales from an East European tradition that became accessible to a wider European audience. The same can be said of Karadžić's folk song collections. After the first two books (1814, 1815) a larger collection of three volumes appeared: *Narodne srpske pjesme* (1823-24). Shortly afterwards came the publication of an

¹⁰ See my paper: 'A Magyar mese — és mondakutatás bécsi triász', in *A magyar nyelv és kultúra a Duna völgyében — Die ungarische Sprache und Kultur im Donauraum*, Budapest, Vienna, 1989, Vol. 1, pp. 375-79.

interesting book in German: *Wuk's Stephanowitsch kleine Serbische Grammatik verdeutscht und mit einer Vorrede von Jacob Grimm* (1824). As the subtitle indicated, folk songs also figured:

nebst Bemerkungen über die neueste Auffassung langer Heldenlieder aus dem Munde des Serbischen Volks, der Uebersicht des merkwürdigsten jener Lieder von Johann Severin Vater.

We should notice that the next similar East European publication of folk songs was Claude Fauriel's *Chants populaires de la Grèce moderne* (2 vols, Paris, 1824-25), from which some texts were translated into English, German and French. The publication of proverbs is as old an occupation as publication itself. Nevertheless, it could be mentioned that Karadžić printed his Serbian proverbs in 1836 (*Narodne srpske poslovice i druge različne, kao one u običaj uzete riječi*), some years before Lönnrot compiled his *Suomen Kansan Sananlasukuja* (Proverbs of the Finnish Peoples, Helsinki, 1841), and V.I. Dal' brought out his great Russian proverb collection, *Poslovitsy russkogo naroda* in 1861-62.

Publication of folklore material in the nineteenth century was not easy. Very often great collections remained unpublished, and were thus unavailable to colleagues and frequently unknown to those undertaking comparative study. Bishop János Kriza (1811-75) issued his 'appeal' for the collection of *székely* Hungarian folk poetry in Transylvania as early as 1842. The main bulk of his collection was finished by 1848, but *Vadrózsák* (Wild Roses), a collection of songs, ballads and tales, appeared in part only in 1863, while the main part of his folk tale collection was forgotten and only rediscovered after 1945: unpublished folklore is a hidden treasure.¹¹ In this respect Karadžić was fortunate in having the opportunities for publishing his songs and other texts. Others were less fortunate. Even such an ardent publisher as Kolberg was only able to see less than half of his collections printed. In Karadžić's case most of the folklore items he collected were published in his lifetime, and even collections of his collections began to appear shortly after his death. Many folklorists in the nineteenth century enjoyed long lives. With his more than seventy-six years, Karadžić is no exception. Even so, the sheer quantity of his published *oeuvre* is amazing. In this respect too, he stands apart from his contemporaries.

Like so many other East European folklorists Karadžić had to live and publish abroad. Pumpurs lived in Moscow, Barons in St Petersburg and Kolberg in Cracow (then part of Austria); Vienna was also the base for the group of three Hungarians who collected and published oral tales

¹¹ Ildikó Kriza (ed.), *Kriza János és a kortársi eszmeáramlatok. Tudománytörténeti tanulmányok a 19. századi folklorisztikáról*, Budapest, 1982.

and legends early in the nineteenth century — G. Gaal, J. Mailáth and A. Mednyánszky. Karadžić also emigrated from Serbia to Vienna; he published most of his works either there or in Germany. Yet, on the other hand, he was permitted to return to Serbia where he undertook fieldwork and where in 1836 he published his collection of proverbs. His work and reputation spread quickly through translations into many languages and quite unlike his East European contemporaries Karadžić did win acclaim, both at home and abroad, and indeed relatively early in his career. In spite of the political troubles in which he sometimes found himself, he received more decorations and distinctions than all his fellow folklorists together, and there was no lack of leading writers and scholars willing to associate themselves with his work (e.g. the Grimms, Goethe).

One reason for Karadžić's exceptional influence may have been the right choice of patrons. Kopitar and members of the Habsburg court in Vienna, the Grimms and other progressive German scholars, Prince Miloš Obrenović, 'the liberator of Serbia', the poet and monarch Njegoš in Montenegro, the most powerful members of the Academy of Sciences in St Petersburg and many other persons and institutions gave him support. The interests of his patrons ranged over so wide a spectrum that he could shift from one to another depending on his needs and the circumstances of the time. All of these persons and institutions had their own interests in mind, coinciding and conflicting at the same time. Karadžić exploited such situations in a masterly manner. In the end, he got what he wanted: a new Serbian literary language, a literature, a grammar and an orthography, and he put the name of Serbian oral tradition on the intellectual map of Europe. Although some of his ambitions were never achieved, his life-work stands firm. There is probably no other significant folklorist in Eastern Europe of whom that can be said.

To come from Serbia in Napoleonic times was to come from the margins of European culture. Serbia was under Turkish rule, and fierce wars against the Turks mark the nineteenth century. Austria and Hungary (including Croatia and Slovenia) were Roman Catholic or Protestant, while Serbia and Russia were ardently Orthodox. The coincidence of very different cultural ambitions characterize the intellectual life in and around Serbia during the nineteenth century. An old-fashioned style of life, a living oral tradition, an illiterate prince determined to bring about the 'first' grammar and 'first' dictionary created the circumstances in which it fell to Karadžić to create a Serbian literature. The folklorists closest to him in spirit (mainly in the Baltic lands) faced a somewhat different situation. In Serbia the hope of liberation from the Turks was the question of the day, with support coming from the rulers of both Austria and Russia. Although Karadžić was indeed a pawn in that game, the importance of his folklore activity is better understood in respect of the rich Serbian oral tradition that he

assembled than in terms of the political implications of the Serbian question.

In short, as a collector, scholar and publisher Karadžić stands out among his contemporaries for four reasons: time, scope, quantity, and topicality. He collected his materials from a region where creative composition in performance was still alive. His collections embraced in varying measure those genres which were to become the main focus of interest for several generations of folklorists. The mass of material which he assembled and published ensured the survival of a large enough corpus for serious historical and comparative research. The corpus preserved for later scholars materials which in some cases would otherwise have been lost; and in cases where similar materials were collected later, the Karadžić corpus provides an invaluable basis for comparative and development studies. The topicality factor is of particular importance. The German translations of his early publications appeared at a time of growing interest in the art of the little tradition, the products of people who had not been educated in the traditions of high culture. The eighteenth-century Romantic origins of this interest are well-known. In some countries, it was more of an intellectual fashion, whereas in others — particularly among minority ethnic groups within the great empires of Europe — it became part and parcel of cultural-political movements which were to culminate in political autonomy. The German translations of Karadžić's materials provided for many people elsewhere in Europe the first real acquaintance with a *substantial* body of the art of the little tradition. The effects of this contact in respect of high culture have already been referred to in this essay; Celia Hawkesworth's bibliography (pp. 85-96) provides a pertinent illustration of Karadžić's impact on the English-speaking world alone. Similarly, the political effects of the stimulation of interest in the culture of the little tradition can be inferred from much of the foregoing, and in another chapter in this volume those effects are examined more closely in respect of a typical emerging nation, Finland.¹²

Illyrianism, pan-Slavism, national awakenings, a determination to create national literatures and national languages in South-Eastern and Eastern Europe were common denominators in various countries throughout the nineteenth century. A person closely engaged in such affairs, as Karadžić was, could draw further importance from that background. But the essence of his work and reputation lies in the intrinsic importance of the materials he collected and in his scholarly presentation of those materials. The lasting importance of this, his work, the annual celebration of it, as at the *Vukove dane* events, demonstrate the continuing validity of those values. This is the main lesson I want to draw in presenting Karadžić as *primus inter pares* in

¹² See Ch. 15.

East European oral tradition scholarship. Looking into his works, one perceives the richness of Serbian folklore — mirroring the richness of Europe's common oral traditions.

Chapter Fifteen

The invention of a national epic

MICHAEL BRANCH

The national epic which is the subject of this chapter is the Finnish *Kalevala*. A tradition-based epic, compiled by Elias Lönnrot, the first edition, the so-called *Old Kalevala*, appeared in 1835, comprising 12,078 trochaic tetrameters arranged in 32 poems; the second edition, substantially revised and enlarged to 22,795 lines arranged in 50 poems, came out in 1849 and has remained the definitive version.¹ At the time of publication of the first edition, it was referred to by representatives of the publisher, the Finnish Literature Society of Helsinki, as Finland's 'national epic' and this attribute has remained in use ever since, regularly and frequently reaffirmed both in Finland and elsewhere through the activities of various political, cultural and educational institutions. The circumstances in which the *Kalevala*'s role as the national epic of Finland has been constantly reasserted have invested in it a significance for oral tradition, literature, the arts and politics which is ill-defined and imprecisely understood; this view applies in particular to the epic's role in shaping the superstructure of Finnish national identity. This process of mystification — if I may use the term in this sense — seems to me to have much in common with the phenomena discussed by Eric Hobsbawm, Terence Ranger and others in their *Invention of Tradition*.²

Thus the purpose of this chapter is to consider the genesis of the two editions of the *Kalevala* from the point of view of 'invented tradition'. The theoretical framework for this examination is provided principally by two works: Miroslav Hroch's *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe* and Anthony D. Smith's *The Ethnic Origins of*

¹ *Kalevala taikka Wanhoja Karjalan Runoja Suomen kansan muinosista ajoista*, 2 parts, Helsinki, 1835. English prose translation with foreword and appendices: Francis Peabody Magoun, Jr., *The Old Kalevala and Certain Antecedents*, Cambridge, MA, 1969; *Kalevala*, 2nd edition, Helsinki, 1849. English prose translation with foreword and appendices: Francis Peabody Magoun, Jr., *The Kalevala or Poems of the Kaleva District*, Cambridge, MA, 1963; English verse translation with introduction: Keith Bosley, *The Kalevala. An Epic Poem after Oral Tradition by Elias Lönnrot*, Oxford, New York, 1989.

² Eric Hobsbawm, Terence Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge, 1983, pp. 1-41.

Nations. Hroch's work offers a model of the various phases through which national movements pass from their inception as a philosophical and cultural idea to the establishment of a politically independent nation-state.³ Smith's analysis of the role of oral poetry and literature in this process sheds light on the cultural and political function of the *Kalevala*, Lönnrot's choice of themes for the main narrative strands, and the sequence in which they are arranged.⁴

Smith sees the *Kalevala* as a typical product of an intellectual community which is attempting to create a 'past' as a part of the process of defining its identity. In discussing the creation of 'the past' in terms of the needs of nationalists Smith asks whether 'nationalism writes its history as it pleases, or is constrained by tradition and the "past" which it records?' This past he describes as being in various degrees 'full' or 'empty', i.e. there exists a greater or lesser corpus of memories and records on which historians can draw in constructing an interpretation of the past useful for their own needs. Sometimes this past seems 'fuller than is often thought; sometimes so full, nationalists must prune it for their purposes and use a very selective memory for the tale they wish to impart ... in most cases, the mythologies elaborated by nationalists have not been fabrications, but recombinations of traditional, perhaps unanalysed, motifs and myths taken from epics, chronicles, documents of the period, and material artefacts.' Depending on the state and size of the corpus of such materials Smith speaks of the 'rediscovery' or the 'reconstruction' of the past.

In creating a history that legitimizes and validates the present, Smith argues that intellectuals sought to 'rediscover' or 'reconstruct their communal pasts' by the use of two criteria: 'the didactic and the dramatic'. Their approach was founded on:

certain recurrent aims. The first was a kind of 'naturalism'. The past that they sought to unfold had to be as organic and natural as conceivable, and their histories interpreted as if they were extensions of the natural state in which communities obeyed similar kinds of 'laws' to those governing the natural world. In other words, societies were subject to the same laws of birth, growth, flowering and decay — and renewal — as plants and trees, and fed by analogous elements. Lack of any of these nurturants spelt decay, and it was the task of nationalist educators to re-supply them.

The tools with which this past was to be recreated were scientific disciplines in whatever state of development prevailing at the time of the nationalist's work; in addition to history these included comparative linguistics, archaeology, sociology, anthropology and folklore. The history that the nationalist intellectual had to create in order to provide

³ Miroslav Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe*, Cambridge, 1985, pp. 22-30.

⁴ Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, Oxford, 1986, cf. in particular Ch. 8: 'Legends and Landscapes'.

identity and values must, according to Smith:

define the entity or unit of which it narrates the drama; and it must *direct* the entity or unit towards a visionary goal. On the one hand, it must supply a history and metaphysic of the community, locating it in time and space among the other communities on the earth; on the other hand, it must generate an ethic and blueprint for the future. The drama which it unfolds must stir us as a collectivity into action for the attainment of communal ends. It must contain a 'message' of revival through moral activity, but at the same time comfort and console us for our lot among the nations. Since every community experiences moments of decline and even subjugation, the drama-mythology must 'explain' the trajectory growth, decline and rebirth; and the first task is to situate and describe the community 'as it was' in its 'pure' or 'unmixed' state. It is to this state that we must return, if we are to partake of the collective re-birth... Identification with an idealized past helps us to transcend a disfigured and unworthy present, and endow our individual lives with a wider significance in a union that will outlive death and dispel futility.

There are two ways in which the community can be located and its 'true state' revealed: through poetic spaces and golden ages. The first involves the uses of landscape, the second the uses of history. The one roots the community in its distinctive terrain; the other charts its origins and flowering in the age of heroes. Both together provide a history and metaphysic of the individuality of the community, from which an ethic of regeneration issues to lead it forward.⁵

In the development of Finnish nationalism the conscious process of shaping poetic spaces and golden ages sets in during the first half of the nineteenth century. At that time the two intellectuals who made the greatest contribution to the process through their work published in the period 1826-49 were the poet Johan Ludwig Runeberg (1804-77) and his friend and contemporary Lönnrot. Both of them contributed to the creation of poetic spaces, Runeberg through his Swedish-language poetry and Lönnrot through the publication of lyric poetry collected and edited from oral materials.⁶ More commonly attributed to Lönnrot are the two editions of *Kalevala* through which the foundations of Smith's 'golden age' were laid.

The various phases of this process, including the earlier period relating to Smith's 'full' or 'empty' history, have to be considered in the light of the chronology of the Finnish national movement provided by Hroch's model. He places developments in Finland in his *Type 1* category of national movements; in this category a period of scholarly interest (Phase A) is followed by a period of patriotic agitation (Phase B). In the *Type 1* model, both Phases occur before the industrial revolution; in Hroch's model for Finland the transition from Phase B to Phase C — the rise of a mass national movement — is coincidental with

⁵ Ibid., pp. 181-83.

⁶ *Kantele taikka Suomen kansan sekä Wanhaja että Nykysempiä Runoja ja Lauluja*, 4 parts, Helsinki, 1829-31; *Kanteletar taikka Suomen Kansan Wanhaja Lauluja ja Virsiä*, 3 parts, Helsinki, 1840; selection in English verse with introduction and notes: Keith Bosley, *The Kanteletar. Lyrics and Ballads after Oral Tradition* by Elias Lönnrot, Oxford, New York, 1992.

the successive industrial and bourgeois revolutions. In translating his periodization into dates for his Finnish model, Hroch argues that the onset of Phase A can be fixed only very loosely. Sporadic evidence of a Finnish consciousness as an identifying factor can certainly be found early in the eighteenth century and by the middle of the century it is possible to speak of territorial patriotism or *Landespatritismus*, Hroch's 'patriotism of the Enlightenment type'. It is only in the early decades of the nineteenth century, however, that a conscious national patriotic movement with agreed cultural-political aims can be identified. The transition from Phase A to Phase B in Finland is placed at about 1840, with Phase B extending into the 1870s-1880s before the rise of the mass national movement at the turn of the century.⁷

The struggle for power in Northern Europe during Phase A prepared the ground for the development of a political consciousness in Finland of a kind typical of the early phases of national movements in various other parts of Europe at about the same time. The turning point was the Russian-Swedish War of 1808-09 when Finland ceased to be a Province of Sweden and became a Grand Duchy within the Russian Empire. This led to further changes in the territory of Finland which was finally fixed in 1812 with the extension east and south-east around Lake Ladoga of the Finnish frontier to include a large area which had been occupied by Russia in the previous century; with this adjustment Finland became a clearly defined territorial unit which was to remain unchanged for more than a century.

For this and other reasons Hroch describes the annexation of Finland in 1808-09 as 'momentous'; Finland became in effect an autonomous unit, governed, apart from a handful of the most senior officials sent from Russia, by Finns. The sense of separateness was further enhanced in 1812 by the transfer of the capital with its historical associations with Swedish rule from Turku in the south-west to Helsinki. A large-scale building programme was set in hand to create all the trappings of government and some twenty years later in 1828 the university — by then a centre of patriotic activity — was also transferred to Helsinki after the destruction of the old university in the fire that burnt down much of Turku in 1827. Thus the administrative preconditions for a political identity were already in existence towards the end of Phase A.

Certain cultural preconditions were also present. During Phase A the vast majority of the population of the area defined at any one time as Finland was monolingual, speaking either Finnish, Swedish or Sami; among the small number of educated people Swedish or, to a lesser extent, German was the language of habitual usage although in specific situations, which were not infrequent, particularly at the university and in the secondary schools, some acquaintance with Latin was required for much of Phase A; this meant in effect that most Finnish educated males

⁷ Hroch, op. cit., pp. 62-75.

were trilingual as a sizeable part of the educated sector of society had either been born to Finnish-speaking parents or if they were Swedish-speaking had had to learn some Finnish in order to deal with servants and go about their daily business. In sum, a large part of the population spoke Finnish as the first language; most educated people could also speak sufficient Finnish for everyday purposes even though it was not their preferred language.

Within the educated circles, particularly at the university, and among some of the teachers in the handful of secondary schools and some of the clergy, it is possible to identify an interest in cultural phenomena relating to the territory's past and present and which were to fuel patriotic pursuits once these were triggered by other factors. As early as the first part of the seventeenth century educated people in Sweden-Finland had been instructed by royal decree to collect:

all sorts of chronicles and narratives, ancient tales and poems about dragons, dwarves and giants, as well as stories about famous people, old monasteries, castles, the dwellings of kings and cities, from which it will be possible to ascertain how things were in ancient times; old poems about heroes and magic ones, not forgetting to take down their melodies.⁸

Over the next hundred years this interest had reasserted itself at various times and for various reasons, leading to an accumulation of knowledge and awareness of local history in the minds of educated men. But it was with the passage of Enlightenment ideas into Finland and particularly views about the economic improvement of local areas that a new concentration on the study of local history, geography and culture had set in; in the second half of the eighteenth century the history of larger parts of the territory was also considered, raising specific questions about the origins of the area's inhabitants. A combination of internal and external factors during the same period stimulated interest in various other matters central to Hroch's Phase A and which helped to determine the particular Finnish emphasis on the process of reconstruction of the past which Smith identifies as an essential feature in the shaping of a national consciousness.

The principal external factor was the romantic interest in local cultures, particularly in their oral poetry, which had reached Finland through works such as Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient Poetry* (1765) and James Macpherson's Ossianic poetry of the 1760s, and the writings of Rousseau. This interest found a ready and informed response in Finland because a large corpus of oral poetry together with details about mythical, legendary and fairy-tale figures had already

⁸ As cited in Lauri Honko, 'The Kalevala process', in *Kalevala 1835-1985. The National Epic of Finland*, Helsinki, 1985, pp. 16-23. For an exhaustive survey and analysis of the occurrence of Finnish oral poetry in documentary sources in the early modern period see Annamari Sarajas, *Suomen kansanrunouden tutkimus: 1500-1700-lukujen kirjallisuudessa*, Porvoo, 1956.

accumulated as a result of the earlier collection of 'monuments of the past'. Of special interest to Finnish scholars were the numerous fragments of a particular type of oral poetry composed in trochaic tetrameters according to apparently commonly accepted prosodic rules and whose performance continued in the more remote parts of Finland. The early interest of Finnish scholars in this tradition is recorded in several publications.

These include a substantial study, *De Poësi Fennica*, published by Henrik Gabriel Porthan (1739-1804) in several parts over the ten years 1768-78; a poem eulogizing the genius and taste of the unlettered Finnish poet published in the magazine of a literary society at the university in Turku; a sizeable body of poetry composed by educated people in imitation of the oral style; the translation of specimens of this type of poetry for visiting travellers (and inevitably its later publication in a reworked form by Goethe); and the compilation of an encyclopaedia on the subject of Finnish mythology in 1789 (significantly the first encyclopaedia ever published in Finland).

The change in Finland's political status in 1808-09 was followed by an upsurge in patriotic activity which again sought to recreate the history of the Finns. But it did so against a new territorial and administrative background and within the framework of new cultural-political concepts. Although with rare exceptions the new ruler in St Petersburg enjoyed steadfast loyalty, Russia seemed at first even more distant than Sweden had been: not only did the Tsar's other subjects speak languages which very few Finns understood, but most of them worshipped God through an alien and despised form of Christianity. These circumstances help to explain the whole-hearted enthusiasm of Finnish intellectuals in the 1810s and 1820s for Johan Gottfried Herder's concept of national culture, and the zeal with which they set systematically about the study of their history, language and oral tradition. The twenty-one years from 1810 to 1831, the year in which the Finnish Literature Society was founded to promote the publication of oral poetry and literature, saw the appearance in Finnish and Swedish of various patriotic journals, Finnish grammars, a major Finnish-Latin dictionary, local and national history, and oral poetry. A substantial part of this work was the outcome of fieldwork, including a major five-year expedition by a Finnish scholar into northern Russia to study the origins of the 'ancient Finns'. Yet the purpose of this work remained one of definitions: the work, as Smith puts it, 'of intellectuals in search of their roots'.⁹

Through this work of historical reconstruction, the corpus of oral poetry materials in the traditional trochaic tetrameter style grew larger and increasingly scholars attempted to reconstruct historical characters and events from surviving fragments. The recurrence of similar

⁹ Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

fragments composed in this style from various parts of Finland and of different fragments about the same characters or set of events led some patriots to ask whether these poems might be arranged in an epic comparable to the *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, or the *Nibelungenlied*. The national importance and the practicality of this idea were reinforced in the late 1810s by the ideological need to seek in the 'little tradition' of non-literate peoples evidence of a forgotten golden age and thereby a better understanding of the self.

During the 1820s other more specific examples of the patriotic imperative of producing an epic reached Finnish scholars from abroad and provided more clearly defined models for the way in which the Finns were to understand and organize their own growing corpus of myths, legends and tales. The mythical character on whom Finnish scholars had begun to concentrate their attention was one Väinämöinen, variously perceived in oral tradition as god, culture hero, epic hero, shaman, bard, Viking warrior, tribal chieftain and rejected suitor. During the 1810s he had been the subject of art and drama; in the following decade historians began to reconstruct his 'historical character' from various oral poetry fragments (Lönnrot studied under one of these historians and in 1827 incorporated his teacher's ideas in a dissertation for his first degree entitled 'De Väinämöine, priscorum fennorum numine').

Among the most important models reaching Finland were Esaias Tegnér's *Frithiofs saga* of 1825 and selections of Vuk Karadžić's Serbian poems translated into Swedish by Runeberg in 1828. *Frithiofs saga* provided an example of the use of Homeric models to reconstruct an ancient Viking Age as a source of confidence in the future and as an example of moral values for the present. The Serbian poems were seen as evidence of the artistic quality and literary value of 'naïve' poetry of the little tradition, exemplifying the importance of such poetry in establishing an awareness of one's own local culture and thus of one's own nationality. These examples, and particularly the arrangement of Karadžić's poems, appear to have provided the two distinct categories of 'lyric' and 'epic' in which Runeberg and Lönnrot were to perceive their own work during the last ten years of Phase A and the first ten of Phase B: the 'lyric' corresponding to the material that Smith calls the 'poetic space', 'epic' to that of his 'golden age'.¹⁰

An essential development in this process was the formation of closer contacts with the people who spoke related languages and dialects in the border areas of Russia — the Karelians and the Ingrians of the

¹⁰ Wener Söderhjelm, *Åboromantiken och dess samband med utländska idéströmningar*, Borgå, 1915, pp. 91-137; Hannes Sihvo, 'Serbialaista ja suomalaista — Runeberg ja Lönnrot', in *Lönnrotin aika*, Helsinki, 1984, pp. 46-53 [*Kalevalaseuran vuosikirja*, No. 64]; Lauri Honko, 'The Kalevala and the World's Epics', in Lauri Honko (ed.), *Religion, Myth and Folklore in the World's Epics. The Kalevala and its Predecessors*, Berlin, New York, 1990, pp. 1-26.

Archangel, Olonets and St Petersburg governments — and in whose communities the tradition of performing and indeed composing oral poetry in the traditional style continued. The Finnish Literary Society, recognizing the importance of collecting such materials, commissioned Lönnrot to visit these areas. Between 1831 and 1834 he undertook three expeditions in Russian Karelia and in addition to accumulating large collections of epic, lyric and magic poetry he recorded and interpreted the folk life he observed through the eyes of an historian and patriot brought up on the ideas of Herder.

Thus the characteristic formulaic structure of the poetry, its mode of composition and performance, the recurrence of closely similar motifs and themes over extensive and widely separated geographical areas found a natural explanation in Lönnrot's mind as the fragments of a lost poetry tradition with all that that implied for the patriot whose thinking had been shaped by Herder and whose understanding of Homer derived from Friedrich Wolf. Indeed Lönnrot makes specific comparison in the Preface of the 1835 *Kalevala* to classical Greek epic and the Icelandic sagas, concluding his Preface in a muted, apologetic tone:

I would not want the songs to be disparaged nor to be biasedly regarded on the other hand as very great. These are not by any means on a par with those of the Greeks and Romans, but it is quite right if they at least show that our forebears were not unenlightened in their intellectual efforts and the songs at least show that.

The same Preface also elaborates in some detail how Lönnrot saw the relationship of the events described in the text to possible historical happenings:

That the subjects sung about in the songs were not all without some foundation in fact anybody will easily understand, but what the real truth is — what things may be described in some other way in a song, what ones may be completely invented — is now quite difficult to distinguish. Certain matters, even when one hears especially odd things or somewhat incredible ones, should on careful investigation somehow clear up. None of us should view Väinämöinen's and Ilmarinen's troubles as deriving from the disappearance of the sun and moon, and how would the dame of North Farm (*Pohja*) have hidden them in the hill? But when one remembers what is said of our forefathers' coming here, that they got to the far north from very southerly lands, and what we know about the disappearance of the sun in winter in high latitudes, we will realize that had they gone clear up north, this phenomenon could, as something strange to them, even arouse a great fear that the sun had gone forever.¹¹

In the same vein Lönnrot comments on the mythologization of the historical characters around whom the main action of the *Kalevala* revolves. His explanation of his epic's title, 'Land of Kaleva', illuminates further his own perception of the epic's role as mythical history, for he explains that Kaleva was the historical leader of the more

¹¹ As cited by Magoun, 1963, op. cit., pp. 367, 373.

commonly mentioned heroes, Väinämöinen, Ilmarinen and Lemminkäinen.

Although Lönnrot did not mention in the Preface to the 1835 *Kalevala* the time and space in which he believed the mythical history of the Finns to have taken place, he discussed this question in an article published a year later, returning to it in some detail in the Preface to the 1849 edition. In a section named 'The Time of the Genesis of the Songs and the Original Home' Lönnrot dates the events as beginning in the first millennium AD and ending with the arrival of Christianity in Finland in the twelfth century. The theatre of the action is placed in the area of extending westwards from the Permian of the Russian Chronicles, which Lönnrot held to be the Bjarmia of the Norse sagas and which he located either:

on the southwest shore of the White Sea and Onéga Bay on the one hand and the Gulf of Finland on the other. That segment of the Finns living in Russian Karelia, among whom these songs have been preserved through the centuries, seems to have been a tribe directly descended from the old, rich, powerful, and famous Permian people. For more than other Finns these have a certain external culture inherited from olden times, curious traces of communal life, an extraordinary zeal for trade which rejects all rebuffs and obstacles, speed both in bodily movement and in presence of mind in their enterprises, all of which, including at the same time their remembrance songs, the Swedish loan-words encountered in their language, the unique ornaments of the women-folk, and so forth, is best explained by the consideration of old Permian times. In physical agility, quick-witted presence of mind, and a desire to trade, the Finnish Ostrobothnians and the Karelians are nearest akin to them, the latter together with the Ingrians also in remembering songs.¹²

Lönnrot elaborated the ancient history of the Finns with an account of how for much of the millennium the people of the land of Kaleva had had to pay tribute to a people further north, in Pohjola, and that it was only the efforts of Väinämöinen, Ilmarinen and Lemminkäinen that had put a stop to this and allowed the people of the land of Kaleva to grow in prosperity. The ideas to which Lönnrot owed his understanding of the ancient history of the Finns were by no means fanciful by the scholarly criteria of his time. Indeed they represented the very latest thinking on the subject of the early population of northern Russia and were distilled from the writings published by his fellow countryman and patriot A.J. Sjögren (1794-1855) between 1830 and 1834 in the annals of the Academy of Sciences in St Petersburg after completing in 1829 a five-year expedition of historical, linguistic and ethnographical research.¹³

It was against this background that Lönnrot set about shaping his mythical history, selecting his materials from a collection of 27,500

¹² Ibid., pp. 377-78.

¹³ Michael Branch, A. J. Sjögren: *Travels in the North*, Helsinki, 1973, pp. 185-260 [*Mémoires de la Société finno-ougrienne*, no. 152].

lines of poetry, most of which together with his working drafts has survived. In the form they had been collected his materials required substantial editing: they were very raw, the motifs were often obscure to anyone from outside the local area in which they had been collected, the themes were often allusive as the singers assumed the audience to be familiar with the narrative. Observance of the prosodic rules was often only partial, and above all some of the dialects in which the poems had been recorded were incomprehensible to Lönnrot's intellectual Finnish readership. But, in addition to the basic task of editing the language and formulaic structure of his materials, Lönnrot also had to work his materials into cantos with an internal coherence and an external logic which held the thirty-two poems of the first edition together.¹⁴

Lönnrot claims to have been guided in his work by the example of his most gifted informants. These singers were known to concatenate in performance strings of poetry with related themes, occasionally producing a narrative of up to 1000 lines. Lönnrot saw in this mode of performance the dying tradition of the bard of the golden age. It was Lönnrot's assumption that such persons had existed and had performed in this way that persuaded him that he could legitimately imitate the most versatile of his informants and arrange his materials to convey specific motifs and themes.

Apart from some changes in the sequence of events both editions of the *Kalevala* have a common thematic structure. The differences between the 1835 and 1849 editions lie principally in the quantity of material used for each episode of the structure, in the handling of that material, and in the different emphases and levels of meaning invested in each episode. These differences in approach and treatment can readily be understood through examination of the change in attitude towards the function of the 'national epic' as Finnish intellectuals adapt to new cultural-political conditions in the early years of Hroch's Phase B.¹⁵

Structurally the epic can be divided into twelve episodes:

1. Prologue. Birth of the hero Väinämöinen, his creation of the cosmos and after that the earth. (1835: Poem 1; 1849: Poems 1-2)
2. Väinämöinen's various efforts to acquire a wife, focusing on the wooing of the daughter of the Mistress of Pohjola, and the need to construct in settlement of the bride-price a magic device (the

¹⁴ Concerning Lönnrot's fieldwork and compilation of the 1835 *Kalevala* see Väinö Kaukonen, *Elias Lönnrot ja Kalevala*, Pieksämäki, 1979, pp. 56-86; John I. Kolehmainen, *Epic of the North*, New York Mills, Minnesota, 1973, pp. 47-89.

¹⁵ Cf. Kaukonen, *Elias Lönnrotin Kalevalan toinen painos*, Helsinki, 1956; Lauri Honko, 'The Kalevala. The Processual View', in Honko (ed.), *Religion, Myth and Folklore in the World's Epics*, op. cit., pp. 181-229; Senni Timonen, 'Lönnrot and his singers', in *Kalevala 1835-1985. The National Epic of Finland*, op. cit., pp. 24-29.

- sampo*) which ensures its possessor everlasting wealth. The smith Ilmarinen forges the *sampo*; the people of Pohjola keep the bride-price but refuse to hand over the bride to Väinämöinen. (1835: Poems 2-5, 31-32; 1849: Poems 3-10)
3. Though already married Lemminkäinen woos the daughter of the Mistress of Pohjola and is refused. (1835: Poems 6-8; 1849: Poems 11-15)
 4. Väinämöinen and Ilmarinen compete for the hand of the daughter of the Mistress of Pohjola by the accomplishment through supernatural means of various impossible tasks. Ilmarinen is finally chosen as the successful suitor. (1835: Poems 9-12; 1849: Poems 16-19)
 5. Wedding of Ilmarinen and the daughter of the Mistress of Pohjola. (1835: Poems 13-16; 1849: Poems 20-25)
 6. The wedding celebrations are interrupted by the resurrected Lemminkäinen who provokes a duel with his host. Lemminkäinen's subsequent flight and erotic adventures form a miniature epic within the main structure. (1835: Poems 17-18; 1849: Poems 26-30)
 7. The Kullervo story. The son of a great family, cursed at birth and brought up as a serf in Ilmarinen's home, Kullervo brings about the death of his malicious mistress, fails to reconcile himself with his fate and commits suicide. (1835: Poem 19; 1849: Poems 31-36)
 8. Ilmarinen forges himself a new wife, is dissatisfied, travels to Pohjola to woo his wife's younger sister but is refused. (1835: Poem 20; 1849: Poems 37-38)
 9. The heroes of the land of Kaleva sail to the north in order to steal the *sampo* from Pohjola. On the way they create the primordial *kantele* from the jawbone of a giant pike. The music of the *kantele* allows them to put their enemies to sleep and take the *sampo*. Overtaken at sea by the Mistress of Pohjola and her warriors, both the *kantele* and *sampo* are destroyed in battle, although small fragments of the *sampo* saved by the heroes of the land of Kaleva bring fertility to their land and waters. (1835: Poems 21-23; 1849: Poems 39-43)
 10. The land of Kaleva flourishes. A new *kantele*, carved from birchwood, gives the bard Väinämöinen the power to create harmony between mankind, the spirit world, animals and the whole of nature. (1835: Poems 24, 29; 1849: Poem 44)
 11. The people of Pohjola seek revenge on the land of Kaleva by sending diseases and a great bear to ravage it, and by stealing the sun and moon. All three attempts are defeated by the skills of the shaman-leader Väinämöinen, leaving the people of Kaleva secure in their prosperity under his leadership. (1835: Poems 25-28; 1849: Poems 45-49)

12. A child born to the virgin Marjatta brings new songs to the people of the land of Kaleva. Väinämöinen is displaced as leader and departs, promising to return when his people need him again and leaving them his *kantele* and his songs. Epilogue. (1835: Poem 32; 1849: Poem 50)

No single episode is represented by a poem as actually performed by Lönnrot's informants. Instead each episode is based on a series of sometimes quite disparate poems from which Lönnrot selected a passage, phrase or even single lines. Where he had more than one variant of the same poem he would extract the version of a particular theme which by his own criteria he judged the best. While a line by line examination of the *Kalevala* reveals very little material which had not been taken, albeit with some editing, from the poems of Lönnrot's informants, the resulting text is nevertheless an epic of Lönnrot's authorship in a form which sometimes has little in common with the substance or style of the poems he collected, and even less with their function.

In the first edition of the *Kalevala* the poems of the little tradition provide the fabric for the communication of the eight motifs which Smith identifies as central to the typology of 'any national mythology or myth of ethnic origins and descent': i.e. origins in time and space, ancestry, migration, liberation, golden age, decline, rebirth.¹⁶ Not all these motifs are explicit in Lönnrot's first edition; indeed the migration motif presupposes knowledge of historical thought of the time, while the rebirth motif is almost allusive in the first edition. Paradoxically, the reason for this may lie in the nature of the oral tradition itself. Lönnrot found abundant material about departing millennial heroes, but very little about subsequent rebirth; where the more developed rebirth motif occurs in the second edition, it is cast largely in materials in which the hand of the compiler is apparent and which include lines of his own composition.¹⁷

The 1835 *Kalevala* appeared in an edition of 500 copies which was finally sold out twelve years later in 1847. Despite this apparently small circulation, there is no reason to doubt the centrality of the epic's influence in the development of a distinctive national culture. We know something of the readership from the reviews and the documented response of Lönnrot's contemporaries. Although reliable statistical evidence is lacking, an examination of Hroch's statistics of membership of the Finnish Literature Society and subscribers to Finnish patriotic periodicals — two of Hroch's benchmarks for identifying and measuring the development of nationalist activity — encourages the assumption that Lönnrot's epic was either read or known about

¹⁶ Smith, op. cit., p. 192.

¹⁷ Cf. *Old Kalevala*, 'Epilogue' with *New Kalevala*, Poem 50, lines 513-620.

throughout the circles engaged in patriotic activity. Membership of the Finnish Literature Society, the sponsor and publisher of the *Kalevala*, in the period 1831-36, was 275; in the period 1844-49 it had risen to 808. In 1845 the Swedish-language patriotic periodical *Saima* had 632 subscribers, the Finnish-language *Maamiehen Ystävä* 1272. The total number of likely readers is not to be calculated by simply adding these figures together for there was certainly some overlap; similarly considerable overlap existed between the readership of these periodicals and membership of the Finnish Literature Society. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the *Kalevala* as a text defining one part of the Finns' national identity was central to the circles most active in promoting patriotic ideas; those who did not or could not read it would certainly have read about it, for articles of an increasingly polemic nature appeared in both of the patriotic periodicals mentioned above as the transition from Phase A to Phase B in the Finnish nationalist movement took place.

The documented response reflects the changing nature of the Finnish nationalist movement during the transition period of the 1830s and 1840s. The initial response to the 1835 *Kalevala* had been to welcome the epic for its historical and literary value. In 1836 the President of the Finnish Literature Society wrote:

The treasure of ancient Finnish songs which has recently been published at the Society's expense is important not only because the native literature has been immeasurably enriched but because it has also acquired a European importance. Indeed, one can say without exaggeration that our literature has for the first time emerged from its cradle. In possession of its epic poems Finland shall learn with growing self-confidence how to understand its future spiritual development. It will be able to say to itself: 'I too have a history! My earliest monuments do not tell of the bloody deeds of heroes but of the gentle pursuits of the bard who, unnoticed in the valleys, gave expression to the brief joys of life and its many pains.'¹⁸

More detailed response later in the 1830s and at the beginning of the 1840s treats the *Kalevala* as a faithful representation of part of a lost epic, concentrating on and debating the historical accuracy with which the various characters and events had been represented. There were also attempts to revise the route that Lönnrot thought the ancient Finns had followed in their migrations and indeed, M.A. Castrén (1813-52), who translated the *Kalevala* into Swedish in 1841, was one of several scholars to attempt to locate the migration route of the Kaleva people while he himself was on a linguistic expedition in Russia. But by the middle of the 1840s discussion of the *Kalevala* began to focus on whether it was an epic at all and what should be the function of epic in a

¹⁸ Translated from the citation in Maija Hirvonen, Anna Makkonen, Anna Nybondas (eds), *15 vuosikymmentä. Kirjallisia dokumentteja erään seuran historiasta*, Helsinki, 1981, p. 32.

national literature. This change in interest was symptomatic of a change in the philosophy and aims of the nationalists which occurred during the transition from Hroch's Phase A to Phase B.

In the 1830s some members of Lönnrot's generation had already begun to see their strengthening sense of national identity as ultimately leading, of necessity, to the creation of a nation-state. As D. G. Kirby has pointed out, the imperial authorities were, on the whole, 'favourably disposed towards the advancement of Finnish cultural ideals' so long as they remained strictly apolitical and there was no suggestion of a weakening in Finnish loyalty towards the Empire. The most prominent and influential of those who argued the idea of the nation-state was Johan Wilhelm Snellman (1806-81), a Hegelian philosopher-politician, who believed that a national culture was meaningless without a conscious national spirit and that the foundation for a national spirit was language. In the 1840s Snellman established himself as the leader of those struggling for the adoption of Finnish as the national language, the development of Finnish-language education, administration and literature, and the abandonment of Swedish. As Kirby shows, Snellman 'feared that the course of history — to which as a good Hegelian he was totally addicted — was not favourable to small nations, and he constantly urged his fellow nationalists to ensure the unity of the nation on the basis of one language and culture in readiness for the *dies irae*'.¹⁹ The publication in 1842 of Snellman's own work on the theory of the state, in which he advanced the idea that the essence of the state was a national spirit, was one of the reasons why he was excluded for many years from any post of influence. He was forced to live for much of the 1840s in the provincial city of Kuopio from where he published the two patriotic periodicals to which Hroch refers in his survey of readership. It was Snellman's thought that dominated the transition from Phase A to Phase B: the Herderian, humanist, multi-lingual cultural pursuits of Phase A were becoming imbued with an uncompromising Hegelian, mono-lingual political imperative.

Snellman himself had written critically about the 1835 *Kalevala* on the grounds that it did not adequately reflect the Hegelian concept of the development of nations. This criticism was taken up and expounded in 1845 and 1846 when the function of epic again became the subject of debate led, this time, by a young scholar at Alexander's University in Helsinki, Robert Tengström. Tengström, who had studied in Germany and was a powerful exponent of Hegelian thought, criticized Lönnrot's *Kalevala* on the grounds that it did not offer a satisfactory depiction of the life of the ancient heroes at the time of their original, unalienated existence. In his view Lönnrot had not made explicit enough the development of the people through the various stages of family and

¹⁹ D.G. Kirby, *Finland in the Twentieth Century. A History and an Interpretation*, London, 1979, pp. 17-18.

society towards a national unity, nor in the latter part of the epic had he portrayed adequately the essence of the national spirit which should form the basis of the new national identity.²⁰

In 1847 Lönnrot decided to rework his *Kalevala*. His view of national identity was also changing and he had taken to heart Tengström's criticisms. In response to the hardening official attitude towards the nationalists, Lönnrot too found himself taking up a political position. In a letter about his decision to rework the *Kalevala* he explained that apart from the practical reason that the old edition had sold out and a new one was required, he needed to undertake the revision without delay before the authorities put a stop to activities of this kind. Although the much enlarged version of the *Kalevala* retained the same structure as the first edition, each episode was elaborated with new material which Lönnrot and other scholars had collected since 1835. As already stated, the treatment of the material had also changed noticeably together with its purpose; in the 1849 edition Lönnrot is no longer just the chronicler but much more the conscious — indeed politically conscious — poet, weaving into his mythical history the features which critics and admirers alike considered essential for a national mythology.

In revising his epic Lönnrot moved away from Wolf's concept of the epic to a concept that was close to Hegel's, away from the romantic towards neo-humanism. The influence both of Schlegel and Hegel is apparent in the treatment of the new edition. The first six episodes of the structure, i.e. the early phases of the land of Kaleva, retain the chronicle approach though each is amplified with much new material. But the following six episodes have become far more dramatic in content. Not only are the characters more fully developed artistically but their behaviour raises ethical issues of right and wrong.²¹ A pertinent example is Episode 7, the Kullervo story, which grows from one canto into six, introduces themes of patricide, incest, suicide, the freedom of the individual will, and even thoughts on raising children. The *sampo* and *kantele* episodes are similarly developed with added detail, the introduction of inner tension, and symbolic values; the *kantele* becomes the explicit symbol of a national culture.

In each episode Lönnrot's new material serves to elaborate a picture of ancient Finnish life compatible with the golden age. Milieu, dwellings, household duties and modes of travel draw on contemporary ethnographical research in the depiction of an idealized society. That society itself is defined more clearly with particular emphasis on the role of women as daughters, wives and mothers, drawing freely and

²⁰ Kaukonen (1979), op. cit., pp. 87-112 and 'The Kalevala as Epic', in Honko (ed.), *Religion, Myth and Folklore in the World's Epics*, op. cit., pp. 157-79; Pertti Karkama, 'Lönnrotin eepinen idea' (*Tiede ja edistys*, 1985, No.2); Sarajas, 'Snellman ja Kalevala', in *Lönnrotin aika*, op. cit., pp. 37-45.

²¹ Karkama, *ibid.*

frequently on materials Lönnrot had published earlier in 1840 in his *Kanteletar*. Man's place in a world inhabited by gods and spirits becomes a dominant component, elaborated at great length by the inclusion of many thousands of lines of magic poetry. Lönnrot uses such materials to reconstruct in much greater detail communal activities such as ancient hunting and agricultural ritual, healing rites, and various *rites de passage*, presenting a pre-Christian worldview as a coherent and sophisticated system of beliefs inherent in a supposedly well-ordered, stable society.

In the context of Hroch's Phase B, particularly in the prevailing Finnish political conditions, it is also necessary to ask whether there is embedded in the text specific political allegory — an approach to *Kalevala* criticism which has hitherto received little attention. The validity of this question acquires a persuasive pertinence in the light of Hroch's models of nationalism and Smith's categorization of the common features of early nationalist cultures. The theoretical constructs of both scholars point to the need to reconsider the significance of events within the *Kalevala* in terms of contemporary circumstances. It is certainly possible to point to several passages in the epic which readily allow this level of interpretation. Finnish commentators, such as the President of the Finnish Literature Society in 1836, frequently draw attention to the rarity of bloodshed and physical violence in the *Kalevala*. Yet accounts of such events are not lacking in Finnish oral poetry although it is true that struggle is frequently portrayed symbolically through contests of word magic. But given the political circumstances of the late 1840s — with strife growing internally between the exponents of Finnish-language and Swedish-language culture and Russian nervousness in St Petersburg and Helsinki about the Finns' political aims — and the emphasis on the acquisition of political power through language-based culture, it follows that reference to physical violence would not have appealed to the compiler. Where physical violence does occur, during the theft of the *sampo* in Episode 9, it is noteworthy that the opponents are a people associated with a Viking tradition and are depicted as attempting to subdue the people of Kaleva. Similarly, the concluding passage of Episode 7, the Kullervo tragedy, which in this context is largely Lönnrot's own compilation, has to be seen as either a lapse in epic sensitivity or an allegorical observation on the need for tolerance and understanding between two groups at different levels of cultural maturity.

It is particularly difficult to escape allegorical interpretation at the very end of the epic, what Smith would describe as the rebirth episode. It is tempting to see in the allegory an internal dialogue between Lönnrot and Runeberg. Only a few months before, the latter had published a collection of poems about Finnish patriotic events and popular heroes focused mainly on the Russian-Swedish War of 1808-09 and which similarly presents an idealized view of a well-organized

stable society (Runeberg's work displays a similar Hegelian-influenced shift in Phase B). It is necessary only to compare the motifs and significance of Lönnrot's concluding lines of the *Kalevala* with the opening poem of Runeberg's collection (later adopted as the Finnish national anthem) to see striking affinities of motif, tone and message.

This examination of the changing circumstances in which the two editions of the *Kalevala* were compiled has attempted to make two main points. The first is that the *Kalevala* is a typical example of the cultural typology of nineteenth-century national movements. From this flows the second point. If the *Kalevala* is a typical product of such forces, then it should be part of *Kalevala* criticism in future to ask of it questions that are asked elsewhere of comparable cultural phenomena (cf. Smith). Another aspect is the counterpart to this: to define more precisely what are the distinctive 'Finnish' features of the *Kalevala*, both as a contemporary document and as it was received by later generations. Much more contentiously, there may be a third point. If the *Kalevala* is primarily a product of a specific cultural-political trend, and if it is accepted that much subsequent oral tradition research is an offshoot of this trend and was pursued for several decades in the same spirit as W.A. Wilson argues persuasively,²² what reappraisal needs to be given to research which has been in some way derivative of Finnish theory and methodology yet which was carried out in different intellectual circumstances and for different purposes?

²² This is the central theme of William A. Wilson, *Folklore and Nationalism in Modern Finland*, Bloomington, London, 1976, pp. 67-117.

Chapter Sixteen

‘The blind Homer of the North’: great-tradition metaphor in portrayals of Finnish and Karelian folk singers

SEPPO KNUUTTILA

The recognition and projection of national success are an essential part of the process whereby Finnish national identity is asserted. Recognition and projection are comparative in approach, the key factor being competitive ability. Culture, trade and industry are fields in which recognition and projection of this kind are practised most visibly; the criteria are international, though with a bias towards Western Europe, and historical: the present is compared to the past.

One form of comparative self-analysis favoured by Finns is the description of artists and other national figures in terms of international role models. At one time, resonant male singers competed for the title of the Finnish Robertino, and Finnish equivalents were sought and found for Paul Anka, Elvis Presley and Tom Jones. A more exhaustive list would also include, for example, its Hemingways, Dalis and Kennedys. Some economists used to view Finland as the Japan of the North; other Finns have claimed that their compatriots’ tendency to introversion and their country’s strict policy on refugees make Finland comparable to an ice-bound Albania. Finns concerned for the fate of their national culture have warned of the dangers of being ‘Switzerlandized’ (an ill-informed comparison with its inference of a lack of any Swiss national culture). Comparative assessment of identity is a universal phenomenon. In Finland, however, it is strictly one-way. I do not know of a single case in which a significant Finn or Finnish cultural phenomenon has been borrowed by other nations for the purpose of self-expression. Since Finland is a republic, its royalty are tango and wrestling kings, beauty and ski queens.

The images produced through national self-analysis and comparison can be characterized as cultural representations. Central to their historical development are a particular period with its political, social and economic conditions, the motives of the individuals who produce and mediate cultural images, and the raw materials on which they base their products. The characterization of these phenomena as set out by Peter Burke in his study of popular culture apply equally to the

folklorist:

It is necessary to mix up different places (the comparative method) or different groups (the regressive method) or different social groups and media, looking at peasant and craftsmen through the eyes of mediators from other classes and studying the written to find out the oral.¹

The cultural representations considered in this chapter are those produced by Finnish scholars and artists. In Finland such representations are numerous and frequently of considerable significance. Finnish cultural pursuits are linked in an interesting way to the shaping of national history. Through their cultural activities Finns have attempted to justify their position as a nation among nations. Peculiar to this process is a strong link to knowledge and interpretations of traditional oral poetry, to the reception of the two editions of the *Kalevala* (1835, 1849), and to the cult destinies of peasant poets and peasant singers. The examples above of Finnish versions of internationally known persons are at least in part, if not wholly, present-day manifestations of the same process.

The conceptual basis of the following examination is the theoretical and methodological approach developed by the French social psychologist Serge Moscovici in respect of the production process of cultural representations. Moscovici's central notions are 'anchorage' and 'objectification'.

These two processes serve to familiarize us with the unfamiliar; the former transferring it to our own frame of reference, where we can compare and interpret it, the latter reproducing it, among what we think is visible and tangible, and thereby bringing it under control.²

The anchors of mythical history

When the first edition of the *Kalevala* was published in 1835, the response of the intellectual and artistic community was clear and precise because they had been carefully prepared for what was to come. As Lauri Honko has argued, the reception created the epos: 'Knowledge about what the *Kalevala* was existed long before it was known what it contained.'³ Holding the newly printed *Kalevala* in his hands, the president of the Finnish Literature Society could proclaim that Finnish literature had reached the level of European literature and that Finland could say of herself: 'I too have a history'. These were the cultural

¹ Peter Burke, 'Oblique Approaches to the History of Popular Culture', in C.W.E. Bigsby (ed.), *Approaches to Popular Culture*, London, 1976, p. 84.

² Serge Moscovici, 'On Social Representations', in Joseph P. Forgas (ed.), *Social Cognition. Perspectives on Everyday Understanding*, London, 1981, pp. 192-93.

³ Lauri Honko, 'Kalevala: aitouden, tulkinnan ja identiteetin ongelmia', in *Kalevala ja maailman eepokset*, Pieksämäki, 1987, p. 139 [*Kalevalaseuran vuosikirja*, No. 65].

representations to which scholarly pursuits had already been anchored for several decades. These representations were finally objectified in the *Kalevala*.

As early as the eighteenth century the pursuit of 'European levels' had already produced imaginative accounts of the 'golden age' of Sweden. Nor did Finnish chroniclers hesitate to present the Finland before incorporation as part of Sweden in the Middle Ages as one of the great centres of the human race. In 1700 a young Finn, Daniel Juslenius (later to become a bishop in Sweden), published his *Aboa Vetus et Nova*, arguably the most significant Finnish cultural work of its day. Juslenius's images of the ancient Finns are an example of monumental megalomania: the devout son of Noah led the Finns to their present homes, bringing with them the Amazons. According to Juslenius, Finnish poetry had already reached a 'European level' by 1690 with Matthias Salamnius's poem 'Hymn of Joy to Jesus', which he claimed to overshadow the glory of Homer, Virgil and other great poets.⁴ In the same vein, almost three centuries later Martti Haavio was to remind us of the Turku poet Johan Paulinus. In a poem in praise of the fatherland, written in Greek in 1678, Paulinus depicted how the righteous goddess Dike came to live in Finland along with the Muses, the daughters of Zeus. Haavio interprets the poet's words liberally: 'This people moved, slowly at first, then with increasing speed into the sphere of western culture.'⁵ Though the degree of truth in these depictions was later to be questioned, the perceptions produced by them have proved to be long-lasting and they continue to exercise some influence.

Depending on one's point of view there are numerous significant dates in the history of Finnish cultural representations. For the purposes of the present examination, 1789 must be considered a pivotal date, for it saw the publication of Christfrid Ganander's encyclopaedic *Mythologia Fennica*. Ganander believed the Finns to be an ancient, civilized people, the descendants of the son of Noah, whose language was related both to the sacred languages of the Bible — Hebrew and Greek — and to the language of the Goths.⁶ Against this background it is understandable that in his *Mythologia* Ganander presents Väinämöinen (a central character in Finnish traditional epic poetry) as the Finnish Apollo and Orpheus, and the smith Ilmarinen (the other main character of Finnish epic poetry) as the Finnish Vulcan. If, in applying the regressive method, we examine how Ganander combines the heroes of traditional Finnish poetry with the gods and heroes of Classical myth and legend, it is reasonable to assume comparison of this kind was a way of raising Finnish mythology to the 'European level'.

⁴ Annamari Sarajas, *Suomen kansanrunouden tuntemus 1500-1700-lukujen kirjallisuudessa*, Porvoo, 1956, p. 132.

⁵ Martti Haavio, 'Turun muusat', in Aale Tynni (ed.), *Martti Haavio. Puheita ja kirjoitelmia vv. 1960-1973*, Porvoo, 1974, pp. 38-39.

⁶ Jouko Hautala, *Suomalainen kansanrunudentutkimus*, Turku, 1954, pp. 80-81.

However, if we adopt Moscovici's approach, a different interpretation presents itself. Classical and biblical myths and legends were well known to Ganander and, as cultural representations, were more ordered than the world of Finnish mythology and traditional poetry. Thus Ganander attempted to anchor what was fragmentary and unclear to a structure and corpus which for him were clear and ordered. At the beginning of the following century this anchorage was to be objectified artistically.

By the end of the eighteenth century there was lively debate in West European cultural circles about the possibility of presenting national mythologies through the visual arts. This trend was later associated in the history of Western thought with the various currents of Romanticism. Most problematic was how to articulate national distinctiveness — above all in the choice of subject-matter — within the framework of universal applicability as demanded by the neo-classical concept of art. In this respect it is significant that in the following century Ganander's *Mythologia* became the main source of reference for artists wishing to depict themes drawn from traditional poetry or the *Kalevala*. Väinämöinen as the Finnish Apollo and Orpheus was conveniently a subject not only of national visual representation, but he was also universal, and universally applicable.⁷

The first monumental work in the history of Finnish art that took as its subject a distinctive 'Finnish' theme was a frieze erected in 1814 at Åbo Akademi (then the seat of higher education in Finland) in Turku. The first panel shows the extent to which the sculptor Erik Cainberg drew on the materials in Ganander's *Mythologia Fennica*. It portrays 'Väinämöinen, as both the Finnish Mercury and Orpheus, the inventor of fire, water and the lyre, the god of all the arts, sitting uppermost on a steep rock in the middle of the rapids playing the *kantele* (Finnish lyre).'⁸ This passage from the sculptor's commission was written as early as 1807, the year before the war that ended with the annexation of Finland as a Grand Duchy in the Russian Empire.⁹ The frieze that was finally prepared, six years after Finland's annexation, recognized changed circumstances in that the last panel of the six-part work depicts the official visit of the Grand Duke, Tsar Alexander I, to Åbo Akademi. While Cainberg's frieze hardly represented the height of artistic achievement, it did, however, visually objectify for the first time a feature from Finnish mythology and portray a Finnish Apollo, Mercury and Orpheus. Since Cainberg's frieze was to be almost the only representation in Finland of Väinämöinen for many years, it can be assumed to have provided an enduring image for the teachers and

⁷ Cf. Pekka Saarela, 'Klassismi ja isänmaa', in *Oulun yliopiston historian laitoksen julkaisuja*, No. 2, Oulu, 1985, pp. 5-45.

⁸ Sarajas, op. cit., p. 295.

⁹ Sixten Ringbom, 'Kreikkalainen vai karjalainen? Kansallisen taiteen muuttuva ihanne' (*Taide*, 72, 1972, p. 6).

students of Åbo Akademi. Some years later in 1831, a statue of 'ancient Väinämöinen' in a classical style, commissioned from the Danish sculptor Gotthelf Borub, was unveiled in the then south-east Finnish city of Viipuri. More a cultural curiosity than an artistic achievement, it represents a national subject executed in a stylish neo-classical mode. The appearance of the *Kalevala* in 1835 did not stimulate an immediate interest in the visual depiction of its themes and subjects: their time was not to come until the second half of the century.

Although various Romantic trends, such as the Celtic and the Gothic, and Herder's ideas found a small but receptive audience in early nineteenth-century Finland, the actual effects of such influences remained relatively slight or, as Matti Klinge has shown, only found expression some decades later. Many interesting and still unresolved problems are linked to the relationship between Romanticism, the collection of traditional Finnish oral poetry and the structure and design of epics. It would be interesting, for example, to examine the development of historical character as part of the Romantic worldview.¹⁰ Honko suggests that character is explained by the fact that 'the roots and models of cultural development were drawn from antiquity'.¹¹ More specifically, it could be argued that while the models were certainly drawn from classical antiquity, the roots were sought in a distant national past, which was anchored to written sources in a well-known and accepted account of that past. This implies that the historical ideas of the Romantics — the Finns C.A. Gottlund (1796-1872) and Elias Lönnrot included — were convergent in nature, since they sought independent parallel development models from established European cultures and specific materials from the national folk poetry. Only later did diffusionism as a cultural theory and the geographical-historical research method developed in Finland make views about convergence relative; however, it did not render them invalid as recent discussions about the theory of epic have shown.¹² In the cultural representations created and maintained by the Finnish intelligentsia, Väinämöinen has retained his position as culture and cultural hero in the manner of Apollo and Orpheus, as has the *Kalevala* its reputation as a masterpiece of world literature.

Salamnius's 'Hymn of Joy to Jesus' is no longer compared to the poetry of Homer or Virgil. Rather the relevant academic debate focuses on whether Lönnrot functioned like Homer or Virgil in the way he shaped his epic.¹³ The perspective of cultural continuity is long and

¹⁰ Matti Klinge, 'Poliittisen ja kulttuurisen Suomen muodostaminen', in Päiviö Tommila, Aimo Reitala, Veikko Kallio (eds), *Suomen kulttuurihistoria*, Vol. 2, Porvoo, 1980, pp. 20-21; Michael Branch, 'Med hand och mun', in *Sampo ei sanoja puutu*, 1974, pp. 77-90 [*Kalevalaseuran vuosikirja*, No. 54].

¹¹ Honko, 'Kalevala', op. cit., p.132.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Hans Fromm, 'Elias Lönnrot als Schöpfer der finnischen Epos Kalevala', in W.

often splendid. In 1981 Italy honoured 'the great poet of its unification' on the two thousandth anniversary of Virgil's death:¹⁴ in the year 2002, Finns will have the opportunity to celebrate the bicentenary of Lönnrot's birth.

Peasant poets and bards

It is well known among Finnish scholars that neither the first nor the second edition of the *Kalevala* stimulated any interest among the educated people in the actual singers of oral poetry, the bards. In short, it was generally accepted that 'the people' were the collective author, preserver and performer of the ancient poetry. One unspoken point of view was that traditional poetry had been preserved unchanged, at least in its essentials, down through the centuries. Burke has characterized this view as a 'myth' created by the intelligentsia in which the peasants are more clearly part of a natural category than a cultural one.¹⁵ Thus later descriptions of bards often mentioned how the sturdy old bearded men of the forests conjured up images of bears and elks in the minds of poetry collectors and artists. I shall return to this point later.

The function and fate of the peasant poets were to demonstrate the historical shift from an oral to a written culture. Gottlund and Lönnrot are examples of active mediators of this shift, both of them publishing large amounts of material written by peasant poets before and after the appearance of the 1835 *Kalevala*. The cult of peasant poets is well founded. As Hannes Sihvo has shown, directional shifts and emphases in this cult are directly linked to the respective development phases of the nineteenth-century Finnish nationalist movement, to changes in the stylistic tendencies of art and literature, and to research into traditional poetry.¹⁶ The makings of the cult had already existed in the eighteenth century; in the early decades of the nineteenth the exponents of this trend of cultural representation confirmed their belief in the written talents of the peasant poets. The culmination of the cult occurred in 1845 with the well-documented journey of three peasants from eastern Finland to Helsinki. Peasant and artistic poets confronted each other as 'equals', and artists drew and painted portraits of the poets from the backwoods. The uneducated men performed for the learned and then returned home, somewhat exhausted but in good spirits.

Lönnrot's explanation for publishing peasant poetry in his journal

Veenker (ed.), *Volksepen der uralischen und altaischen Völker*, Wiesbaden, 1968 [*Ural-altaische Bibliothek*, Vol. 16]; Lauri Honko, 'Lönnrot: Homeros vai Vergilius?', in *Lönnrotin aika*, 1984, pp. 31-36 [*Kalevalaseuran vuosikirja*, No. 62].

¹⁴ Teivas Oksala, 'Virgil's Aeneid as Homeric, National and Universal Epic', in Lauri Honko (ed.), *Religion, Myth and Folklore in the World's Epics. The Kalevala and its Predecessors*, Berlin, New York, 1990, pp. 49-71.

¹⁵ Burke, op. cit., p. 81.

¹⁶ Hannes Sihvo, 'Kuinka kansan runoniekka on kuvattu?', in *Wäinämöisen Weljenpojat*, 1975, p. 49 [*Kalevalaseuran vuosikirja*, No. 55].

Mehiläinen (The Bee) provides a pertinent illustration of the ideas behind the peasant cult. As his first reason for publishing poetry of this kind Lönnrot gives 'the honesty and purity of their Finnish language'; in this respect he believed the language of the intellectuals to have been corrupted by the influence of Swedish. Lönnrot's second reason was that the life of the ordinary people and their way of thinking were expressed more honestly in peasant poetry than in the writings of the intellectuals. As his final reason Lönnrot stated his belief that the poems merited publication in order to demonstrate to non-Finns the literary talents and skills of the Finnish people.¹⁷ It was in such ways that language-linked cultural pursuits were deliberately objectified.

After the 1850s, the cult of the peasant poets quickly declined. From the beginning of the 1860s, the growing confidence in the use of literary Finnish for poetry, drama and prose fiction raised the aesthetic quality of imaginative writing to a level that the self-taught peasant poet could not have reached without the help of a mediator, and such help was no longer forthcoming. Furthermore, as Sihvo has noted, the study of traditional poetry established by Julius Krohn and his son Kaarle was to revise the order of hierarchy in the 'gallery of Finnish national poetry': '... peasant poets were consigned to the second rank, the original bards raised to the first.'¹⁸ It is worth mentioning here that heroic portraits were not drawn of the peasant poets, neither visually nor verbally. Rather the opposite occurred. They were presented as ordinary or unimposing in physique and appearance but as intellectually impressive.

Between the cults first of the peasant poet and then later of the bard comes another cultural representation of particular interest: the folk singer. The date of the beginning of the folk singer representation cult can be set at 1853 when — in the words of the Romantic writer and historian Zachris Topelius (1818-98) — 'the complete folk song in all her beauty and uniqueness, clad in her commonness, ventured forth to the proudest but to the most alien palaces of the Finnish capital'.¹⁹ This 'folk song' arriving in Helsinki was Kreeta Jaakontytär, wife of a sharecropper from the Kokkola district in western Finland. Her triumphal march through the salons of the grand throughout the Grand Duchy of Finland started with this journey. Heikki Laitinen records that Kreeta Haapasalo (as she was to become known after the name of her home village) satisfied two important criteria: she accompanied her songs on the *kantele* and her songs represented a more recent type that were closer to the musical taste of the upper classes.²⁰ Laitinen argues

¹⁷ Kaisa-Marja Perttunen, 'Lönnrot ja rahvaanrunous', in *Wäinämöisen Weljenpojat*, 1975, pp. 130-31 [*Kalevalaseuran vuosikirja*, No. 55]

¹⁸ Sihvo, op. cit., p. 59.

¹⁹ Heikki Laitinen, 'Kansallislaulajatar Kreeta Haapasaalo' (*Rondo*, No. 2, 1980, pp. 18-20).

²⁰ Heikki Laitinen, 'Surullista, köyhää ja nöyrää. Musiikillisen kansakuvan syntyvaiheita ja seurauksia' (*Musiikin suunta*, No. 3, 1986, pp. 40-43).

persuasively that the reception of traditional poetry and folk songs that conditions Finnish attitudes to such art today was shaped and mediated to us through the experience of the upper classes in the nineteenth century. An interesting feature of the representations of both the folk song and the traditional poem is a mood of melancholy which is widely believed today to be an inherent characteristic of the Finnish temperament. The idea of melancholy as an essential part of the Finns' mentality was current in the nineteenth century and had a powerful influence on the upper classes of the time. This mood was apparent in 1866 when Finnish artists participated for the first time in an exhibition of Scandinavian art held in Stockholm and attracted harsh criticism. R.W. Ekman's paintings on *Kalevala* themes, for example, were considered especially unacceptable, while in Finland Fredrik Cygnaeus felt it necessary to defend the painters against the Swedish critics by claiming that the soul of the Finnish artist was typically melancholic, submissive and sentimental in character.²¹

The bard on stage

The coming together of the oral poetry collectors — an influential section of the intelligentsia of the time — and the bards, brought into sharp focus the interaction between two social classes — the highest and the lowest — and two lines of tradition: the great and the little. Many collectors left their singer-informants (and others too) with the feeling that a song could be exchanged for money like any other commodity. The memoirs and travel accounts of many poetry collectors record that the offer of poems for money was often little more than a form of begging. As so many nineteenth-century travellers, they were often shocked by the mix of humility and greed that they witnessed in their first-hand dealings with the poor. The effect of a collector's presence in a village is vividly captured by the following account by Theodor Schvindt of his experiences in the Karelian village of Vaskela in Sakkola district in 1876:

We had hardly been an hour in this Russian Orthodox Karelian village when the house we were in began to hum like an anthill. Almost all the wives of the village and a number of children had arrived. One had a broken thunderbolt, one an embroidered towel, one had a head-dress for sale, another offered to lament, a third to sing the story of 'The Gift'.²²

Senni Timonen notes that this was the occasion of Schvindt's first meeting with the peasant woman Larin Paraske, who was later to become the best known of all Finnish bards.²³ For Paraske, singing for

²¹ Ringbom, op. cit., p. 8.

²² Senni Timonen (ed.), *Näin lauloi Larin Paraske*, Pieksämäki, 1980, pp. 157-58; Sulo Haltsonen, *Karjalainen kansantutkija*, Helsinki, 1947, pp. 210-11.

²³ Timonen, op. cit., p. 158.

money was regarded as socially acceptable and indeed normal. In this context it is appropriate to say that *she* 'found' Pastor Adolf Neovius and began to sell him her songs. Out of this meeting, which was thus no coincidence, came years of co-operation and exchange between the practitioners of scholarship and art and the representatives of originality. Paraske herself and her vast repertoire of songs achieved a level of fame in Finland such that she and her skills are still widely remembered even today. Paraske was not, however, the first singer to be lionized in this way. Before her, peasant poets, musicians and the performers of more recent folk song types, such as Kreetta Haapasalo had already acquired celebrity status in upper- and middle-class circles. Thus the intelligentsia laid the foundations for the 'commercialization' of oral poetry and folk music, a phenomenon — folklorism — which was later interpreted as a symptom of decadence.

As Sihvo has shown, the cult of the bard was born and nurtured in the intellectual atmosphere of the Finnish national Romantic movement in the second half of the nineteenth century, especially in those circles which cultivated Karelianism. The exponents of the cult were first and foremost teachers, scholars and artists. Numerous popular education and enlightenment bodies provided an organizational framework and facilities for these activities. In the 1880s, families with a tradition of bards became the object of special attention. For scholars, this interest sprang from the particularization of the geographical-historical method, but there were also other reasons for it. Images of great families of singers and seers were anchored to cultural knowledge about noble families, their family trees and heraldic insignia. The ancestors of the bard families were monumentalized from family chronicles and stories. They were depicted as great seers, and comparisons with ruling families began to appear regularly in descriptions of the bards. O.A. Forsström, a lecturer at the Sortavala Teacher Training College and an important propagator of folklore about the bards and of Karelianism, characterized the men of the Shemeikka family as the intellectual and military nobility of Karelia.²⁴

The placing of folklore on the stage was encouraged by the song and music festivals arranged by the Popular Education Society, the first of which took place in 1884. Even in her old age Kreetta Haapasalo, the 'national singer', continued to be in demand and was invited to perform at the Jyväskylä Festival in 1887. Five years later, three bards from the south-east Karelian area performed at the Turku Festival in Finland. The real breakthrough of the bards, *kantele* players and lamenters occurred, however, when the festival was held in the south-east Karelian town of Sortavala in 1896. Eight performers were engaged for the festival locally from Suistamo; in order to create an ethnographically authentic setting for their performance, the organizers provided them

²⁴ O.A. Forsström, *Kuvia Raja-Karjalasta*, Helsinki, 1894, p. 118.

with a special stage of their own at the edge of a forest. At both the Sortavala Festival and other similar events, the organizers felt it necessary to limit the duration of the bards' performances and to have some control over their programme. Decorum, sobriety and modesty were also demanded of the singers. It is particularly interesting to note that at the 1900 Helsinki Festival the bards had to be told that their performances were too long for the limited time available. In other words, they were required to perform only extracts of traditional poems and pieces of music. Since it was the requirements and aesthetic taste of the organizers and audience that determined the structure of the oral poetry performed on the stage, the bards were forced to conform with the performance conventions of artistic poetry and song. Utz Jeggle and Gottfried Korff have shown how precisely the reverse process occurred with the wandering Zillertal singers in the early nineteenth century. Four lines from a song and some yodelling did not satisfy the taste of the audience and the performers had to add a number of lines to their songs.

Many ethnologists dealing with Central and East European tradition have reached the same conclusion as their Finnish colleagues that wandering singers wanted to barter their songs and music, and have interpreted this as a sign of dishonesty.²⁵ In this respect it is interesting to consider Haavio's comments on how in some cases the performance of oral poetry became sheer buffoonery for the sake of making money: 'Just as the noble Red Indian chiefs began to display their feathers in circuses, mediocre versifiers started ... to give performances supposedly based on *Kalevala* tradition to audiences who knew no better.'²⁶ At the 1911 Suistamo *kantele* playing and singing competition, two participants were disqualified for having performed as professionals.²⁷ From the point of view of the bards and musicians, however, professional performance was a way of life derived from folklorism and for which the upper and middle classes had created the framework and dictated the norms. The public performances of the bards served the ideological aims of the exponents of folklorism and were, accordingly, strictly supervised, assessed and rewarded.

Numerous descriptions of the bards show that the physical appearance of the male singers and musicians made a greater impact on their audiences than the content of their performances. This phenomenon is also reflected in the many observations about the quality of the performances and the expectations of the audiences. This is why one commentator thought it necessary to warn educated listeners:

²⁵ Utz Jeggle, Gottfried Korff, 'Zur Entwicklung des Zillertales Regionalcharakters. Ein Beitrag zur Kulturökonomie' (*Zeitschrift für Volkskunde*, 1974, pp. 39-57).

²⁶ Martti Haavio, *Viimeiset runonlaulajat*, Porvoo, 1948, p. 208.

²⁷ Leea Virtanen, 'Suistamo ja Korpiselkä', in Pertti Virtaranta, Väinö Kaukonen, Matti Kuusi, Leea Virtanen (eds), *Karjalan laulajat*, Tampere, 1968, p. 167.

He who has learned to appreciate the *Kalevala* only as a printed book, who has heard it read as the many beautiful, deeply felt thoughts of the spirit of a great people, its eternal power, of the depths and elegance of the feelings of that people, will surely be disappointed when he hears the poems for the first time from the mouth of the singer.²⁸

This is why Haavio was so disappointed when as a young schoolboy he heard the performance of Iivana Onoila, one of the most widely travelled performers: 'The image I had created of *Kalevala* poetry was wellnigh shattered by Onoila's performance.'²⁹ Significant in admissions of this kind is the imputation of the sublime, a sensation and mode of experience that has been characterized as the crux of the contradiction between joy and anguish, inspiration and despair, the pleasant and unpleasant. Despite all the guidance and care, stage presentations of oral poetry rendered banal the audience's wish and readiness to experience the sublime. The post-modernist philosopher Fredric Jameson has characterized this creation of contradiction as the 'hysterically sublime'.³⁰ The situation can also be described with a touch of humour: the anticipation of a great moving experience is reduced to mundane commonplace.

Cult and destiny

For collectors and scholars of traditional poetry the basic dimension of the sublime experience was the contrast between the 'material poverty and spiritual richness' of the bards. The sublime can also be categorized as the aesthetic and even ethical readiness of the intelligentsia to have dealings with the representatives of the socially lower strata.

The intellectual atmosphere of Romanticism, especially nineteenth-century Finnish national Romanticism, encouraged the tendency among the intelligentsia to seek the sublime. In addition to the fatherland, the Finnish language and the *Kalevala*, the bards were part of the concept of the sublime. Phenomenologically this situation has much in common with the process already described in connection with Ganander's projection of Väinämöinen as the Finnish Orpheus. By conferring titles on the bards, they — or rather the perception of them — were anchored to the great tradition. They had been transformed into the nobility, kings and princes of poetry, into great mothers, madonnas. Larin Paraske has been characterized as the *Kanteletar* (female spirit of the *kantele*), the Finnish muse and Mnemosyne. The most renowned singer of *Kalevala* poetry, Arhippa Perttunen, was crowned 'King of the Poem', while his son, Miihakali, was popularly known as the 'Homer of the North'. An important feature of such characterizations is their visual

²⁸ O. Relander, *Karjalan kuvia*, Helsinki, 1893, p. 49.

²⁹ Haavio, *Viimeiset runonlaulajat*, p. 210.

³⁰ Fredric Jameson, 'Postmodernismi eli kulttuurin logiikka myöhäiskapitalismissa', in Jussi Kotkavirta, Esa Sironen (eds), *Moderni/postmoderni. Lähtökohtia keskusteluun*, Jyväskylä, 1986, pp. 262-64.

quality, an essential feature of objectification in Moscovici's thinking:

In the first phase, objectifying means to discover the iconic aspect of an ill-defined idea or being, that is, to match the concept with the image. Comparing is already shaping, filling what should remain empty with some substance.³¹

Haavio comes to an interesting conclusion in considering the image evoked for him by the epithet 'Homer of the North'. He sees nothing in the picture of Miihkali Perttunen that is reminiscent of the statue of Homer in his history book. There is much in Perttunen's features which he associates with the ancient Greek face, while the picture of Homer leads him 'to think more of a barbarian'.³² Haavio's reference to barbarian traits in the picture of Homer is of particular interest, since *fin-de-siècle* Finnish painters following the lead of Akseli Gallen-Kallela settled on the heroic portrayal of Väinämöinen as the most appropriate. Thus representations of Väinämöinen are based on the so-called wise man type, characterized by long hair and long beard, deep-set searching eyes, the brows left in shadow. An important predecessor for this facial type was ancient classical depictions of the barbarians.³³ Other characteristics of the heroic wise-man type are physical strength and a youthful body. All these characteristics are present, for example, in the description of the bard Iivana Onoila: 'Onoila', Haavio quotes, 'was in his time one of the most handsome and attractive men in the whole of Finland: his body long and slender as a pine, and his features as if chiselled by a Michelangelo.'³⁴

Many Finnish scholars would agree with Leea Virtanen's conclusion that the exponents of Karelian Romanticism at the turn of the century did not travel there so much in search of information about poems or their singers, 'but rather in search of living proof of the image they had created'. This image, according to Virtanen, 'was certainly influenced by a knowledge of Homer'.³⁵ Thus Homer acquired a new significance as the visual archetype and intellectual linchpin of the whole bard cult. The effect of this association has been so powerful that metaphors denoting the sublimity and nobility of the bards still even today continue to find a place in scholarly writings on the subject. Inherent in the images of the intelligentsia on the one hand and the social reality of the bards on the other is a contradiction which still awaits a critical examination that is free of Romantic preconceptions.

As an illustration of the bard cult, incorporating many of the factors discussed above, I shall now outline briefly the lionization of one of the

³¹ Moscovici, *op. cit.*, p. 199.

³² Haavio, *Viimeiset runonlaulajat*, p. 91.

³³ Jukka Ervamaa, *R.W. Ekmanin ja C. E. Sjöstrandin Kalevala-aiheinen taide*, Espoo, 1981, pp. 145-46.

³⁴ Haavio, *Viimeiset runonlaulajat*, p. 200.

³⁵ Leea Virtanen, 'Kerääjät ja laulajat', in *Karjalan laulajat*, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

best known bards, Petri Shemeikka (1821, or 1825-1915). Unlike some other well-known bards, Shemeikka's outward appearance and modest behaviour matched exceptionally closely the perceptions and expectations of the intelligentsia. Clearly, he had a striking presence, since so many artists and writers have recorded their impressions of him. A recurrent theme is the portrayal of Shemeikka as a bear or elk hunter, wandering alone through the forests. Yet — perhaps a minor point as far as his cult destiny was concerned — in reality Shemeikka was neither an outstanding singer nor seer, despite the assertion in many of the descriptions of him that he was one of the best singers in eastern Finland.³⁶ Virtanen has demonstrated that compared to his contemporaries his repertoire was not large, comprising a few well-known epic poems and some twenty incantations.³⁷ Frequent reference is made to his taciturn nature, a character trait that was seen to enhance his prestige; his very presence was said to make others fall silent. In common with other lionized bard figures, ruler epithets were frequently attributed to him; his whole being radiated nobility, as if he had been born to rule over others; some commentators sensed a supernatural quality in his being, seeing in him the incarnation of ancient Väinämöinen.³⁸

Descriptions of Shemeikka's physical appearance usually concentrated on either his head or his body. His posture is always 'regal'. Even though his back may be bent from a lifetime's burdens, it is clear from the portrayal that in his youth it had been straight and proud. His trunk was depicted as sturdy with broad shoulders, powerful arms and legs. His physical strength was usually associated with hunting, although Haavio was to write a story about Shemeikka's exceptional strength in load-carrying; he was said to have once carried a sack of flour weighing forty kilograms over a distance of forty kilometres.³⁹

By the time he was lionized as the virile epitome of the bard by the neo-romantics in the 1890s, Shemeikka was already in his seventies. In spite of this the propagators of his cult did not hesitate to portray him at one and the same time as the straight-backed man of his young days and as the grey-headed, grey-bearded patriarch: the eternal seer. The intelligentsia's collective perception of the wise man type were fully realized in the shape of Shemeikka's head and the features of his face:

A long grey beard rolling down to his breast, bushy hair around his ears, the crown of the head already bald, but his hair magnificent around the sides; his tanned face was firm and regular, the nose noble, the bushy eyebrows defiantly

³⁶ Hjalmar Basilier, 'Shemeikäiset. Salmin kihlakunnan parhain laulajasuku' (*Virittäjä*, 1986, pp. 123-26).

³⁷ Virtanen, op. cit., 'Suistamo ja Korpiselkä', p. 174.

³⁸ Haavio, *Viimeiset runonlaulajat*, pp. 180-89.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 186.

powerful, beneath them a look that was sharp and searching.⁴⁰

It was the sculptor Alpo Sailo who monumentalized Shemeikka as the permanent archetype of the bards. In his memoirs Sailo discusses his representation of Shemeikka and his own thoughts about his subject's character:

He was of average height, his body well proportioned, broad shoulders, full arms, firm hands. The proportions of the limbs to the body were right — a sign of good powers of co-ordination between brain and body ... In looking at his rugged but at the same time handsome facial features I tried in vain to recall a suitable comparison. I compared this peasant to the great geniuses of the past — Tolstoy, Darwin — but the first to flash through my mind, Leonardo da Vinci, returned and at the end remained. In addition to a physical similarity, both were men of intellectual and bodily strength.⁴¹

Sailo's notes demonstrate a curious continuity in the style of character representation. The association of Leonardo da Vinci and Petri Shemeikka was objectified in Sailo's monumental statue, 'The Bard', unveiled in Sortavala in 1935 at the *Kalevala* centenary celebrations.

Many accounts of the passing of the 'heroic generation' are associated with Shemeikka's old age, often elegiac, sometimes even tragic. Typical of these accounts is the almost total lack of any kind of criticism of Shemeikka. I have discovered only one which contains a hint of criticism; the writer noted that Shemeikka was distant, difficult to approach, lacking in humour, proud.⁴² It is Sailo's visualization that has become the permanent collective image of the heroic bard. In the 1985 *Kalevala* sesquicentenary year the Finnish Post Office issued two special stamps, commemorating Larin Paraske and Petri Shemeikka respectively. It is interesting to read from the notes accompanying the issue of the stamps that Shemeikka continued to be described as 'the great bard (of Finland)', 'as majestic as Väinämöinen'.

As Annamari Sarajas has shown, a certain empathy is necessary to understand the significance of the experiences of 'the last romantics' on their pilgrimages to Karelia at the turn of the century. 'Let us think of Petri Shemeikka, for example,' she writes 'at home in Mysisvaara in Korpiselkä being visited by Sibelius, Inha or Sailo, who compared Shemeikka's face to Leonardo da Vinci's.'⁴³ What is essential for present-day research, however, is that such experiences (including the sublime), and the artistic descriptions and the scholarly work inspired by them — the processes of anchorage and objectification — are

⁴⁰ Eliel Wartiainen, *Shemeikka*, Porvoo, 1923, p. 99.

⁴¹ Alpo Sailo, 'Muistelmä Pedri Šemeikasta' (*Kalevalaseuran vuosikirja*, No. 8, 1928, pp. 192-93).

⁴² Iivo Härkönen, *Runonlaulajia. Vanhan runon viimeinen miespolvi itäisellä Suomenääreillä*, Helsinki, 1926, pp. 118-19.

⁴³ Annamari Sarajas, *Viimeiset romantikot*, Porvoo, 1962, p. 108.

understood for what they were at the turn of the century. As materials of research they are valid for the understanding of that process only, and cannot be used for objective historical reconstruction of oral tradition and its performance.

Dominant images

Oral poetry is not the only discipline closely associated with the shaping and definition of the national image for which there exists an extensive body of literature in Finland. The same can also be said of other disciplines and arts relating to the definition of a national image (history in particular). The methodological approach to the questions of the national image, however, has tended to be documentative rather than interpretative in nature. An attempt to join these two approaches in a new critical method was made by William A. Wilson in his *Folklore and Nationalism in Modern Finland*.⁴⁴ Although Wilson's historiographical approach illuminates various issues and identifies a range of significant problems, it remains essentially short term in its historical dimensions. Wilson's approach does not come to grips with the long-term features of continuity in the worldview of the Finnish intelligentsia. I wish to argue that an important and very influential component of this view has been assessment of Finnish traditional poetry and myth history in the context of the European classical cultural tradition: the great tradition. As I have attempted to show, the operational mode of this mentality has determined not only what was considered to be 'folklore', but has also led to the selective use of performers. One outcome of these conditions is the production of 'fakelore', to borrow Alan Dundes' terminology.⁴⁵ Since in Western societies the ideas and tastes of the upper classes have until recently tended to exert a dominant influence, it is not surprising that images of a golden age and of the nobility of the 'national spirit' have influenced societal and political aims. In the early decades of independent Finland, for example, these images had a considerable role in shaping right-wing thinking, including ideas of territorial expansion. Nor should we forget that comparable national delusions of grandeur associated with eighteenth- and nineteenth-century interpretations of classical values have unleashed tragically destructive forces during the present century in various parts of the world.

One basis for a comparative analysis of identity is always the present — the historical present — that is aspects of the past are examined in

⁴⁴ William A. Wilson, *Folklore and Nationalism in Modern Finland*, Bloomington, London, 1976; Wilson, 'Kriitikon osittainen katumus: Kalevala, politiikka ja Yhdysvallat', in *Kalevala ja maailman eepokset*, op. cit., pp. 404-16.

⁴⁵ Alan Dundes, 'Nationalistic Inferiority Complexes and the Fabrication of Fakelore: a reconsideration of Ossian, the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, the *Kalevala*, and *Paul Bunyan*', in Reimund Kvideland, Torunn Selberg (eds), *Papers I. The 8th Congress for the International Society for Folk Narrative Research*, Bergen, 1984, pp. 155-71.

the knowledge of the present, either ignoring or not knowing the facts of the past. The guiding principle in research into Finnish traditional poetry has long been that folklore contains a message from the past. Dundes' argument that 'inferiority breeds superiority'⁴⁶ can also be considered from the opposite point of view: a consciousness of the great achievements elsewhere in the history of European culture has in peripheral areas also created feelings of insignificance and inferiority for which it is difficult to compensate. According to Matti Klinge, the citizen of the Nordic countries lives 'in the reality of being part of the highest standard of living in Europe, but in his heart he feels himself simple, isolated and poor'.⁴⁷ Perhaps we can add here that the upper classes of society have always lived in the reality of a high standard of living, while simplicity, poverty and humility have been provided through association with spiritual and worldly power as it is perceived to be experienced both spiritually and materially at a lower social level. In such cases superiority breeds inferiority.

In June 1987, a seminar was held in Finnish North Karelia, in the north-east corner of Fenno-Scandinavia, to consider the importance of the forests, space and the future. Among the many speakers was the well-known Polish eco-philosopher Henryk Skolimowski. He told the Finns to look after their forests carefully because Finland was the modern Delphi, the Sacred Grove, from which a new culture could arise.⁴⁸ Did the speaker realize just how perfectly his comparison fitted the chain of images of Finnish self-analysis and cultural comparison?

⁴⁶ Dundes, op. cit., 1984, p. 163.

⁴⁷ Matti Klinge, *Kaksi Suomea*, Keuruu, 1982, p. 105.

⁴⁸ Erkki Pirtola, 'Suomiko pyhä lehto?' (*Ilta-Sanomat*, 16/6/1987).

PART FIVE

SOME PRESENT-DAY FUNCTIONS OF TRADITION

Chapter Seventeen

Singers on their songs: the act of singing as perceived by singers in the Setu region of Estonia today

LEE A VIRTANEN

A living tradition

The Setu region, located in the south-east corner of Estonia, is noted for the unusual richness of the traditional culture which has survived among women and girls in largely non-literate communities.¹ Although the mass media and the norms of modern industrialized society have had their influence on Setu culture, the changes that spread through the rest of Estonia were felt in the Setu region only about a century later. As a result, some aspects of traditional oral culture survived and a small number of singers continue to perform songs which belong to an ancient tradition. A distinctive feature of Setu culture is the role of women and girls as creators and transmitters of a large body of traditional songs. This rich area of tradition is representative of a powerful women's culture. Traditional songs function specifically as a reflection of women's values, as a medium of communication and as an alternative language. The tradition depends for its survival both on female social groups and polyphonous choirs and, at the same time, on an unspoken sense of shared fate. The songs preserve a world in which the difference between male and female values and attitudes is unquestioned and in which the act of singing forms part of women's social identity.²

There is something intrinsically archaic about the Setu style of performance: the songs are different, though in a way that eludes precise characterization. For this reason the Setu singing tradition offers an interesting subject for research as one of the very few examples left in Europe of a traditional oral culture whose performers can still be questioned about their songs and the act of singing. What makes the study of the Setu singing tradition so valuable is the possibility of

¹ With the incorporation of Estonia into the former Soviet Union, the main area of Setu population — the Petseri district — was separated from the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic and made part of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic. This situation remains unchanged following the restoration of independence to Estonia.

² Leea Virtanen, 'Setukaiset kertovat lauluistaan', in Leea Virtanen (ed.), *Viron veräjät*, Helsinki, 1987, pp. 161-62.

investigating it in the largely untouched environment of the Setu communities. For those Finnish scholars who are still concerned with the traditional non-strophic, trochaic tetrametric, alliterative Baltic-Finnish oral poetry and who have to rely for the most part on texts that have been randomly collected out of context, the living Setu tradition offers a useful source of insights into how traditional Baltic-Finnish oral poetry may have been performed. While the conclusions drawn on the basis of comparison with Setu materials cannot, of course, be generalized in respect of the entire Baltic-Finnish region,³ examination of Setu songs and performance styles can nevertheless throw light on several problems in which researchers are becoming increasingly interested. How, for example, does a singer improvise and create new material, what does the act of singing mean to the performer, and what actually happens during the process of interaction between performers and audience?

At the turn of the century the population of the Setu villages numbered some 20,000; by 1922 it had fallen to 15,000 and in 1975 it was 6,780.⁴ The villagers, who all belonged to the Russian Orthodox Church, have been described by visiting researchers as withdrawn and resistant to change. Estonians from more developed parts of their country regarded the Setu as backward, while the Setu themselves looked down on the Russians and claimed to avoid mixed marriages.⁵ In the early decades of the present century the Setu region and its inhabitants represented, superficially at least, a 'peasant culture' in an 'old agrarian community'. However, such classifications are inevitably a simplification. Even the use of such oppositions as modern industrial society and primitive society is unhelpful and can be misleading, for, as Ruth Finnegan has pointed out,⁶ such terms obscure the complexity and variety of different cultures. Nor does cultural change proceed evenly in the same community. To take one example that was significant for Setu culture at the beginning of the century: the few existing schools provided education for boys only.

The materials on which this chapter is based have been drawn from three sources. The picture of the past has been constructed from archive materials and reports left by researchers who visited the Setu region. For information about the present state of Setu culture I am indebted to

³ The 'Baltic-Finnish' area comprises present-day Finland, Estonia and those parts of Karelia, Russia and Latvia where languages closely related to Finnish and Estonian are spoken, i.e. Karelian, Vepsian, Votic, the Ingrian dialects (Izhora, Savakko, Äyrämöinen) and Livonian.

⁴ 'Setumaa' in *Eesti*, Vol. III, Tartu, 1928, pp. 39-41; E.V. Rikhter, *Integratsiia setu s estonskoi natsiei. Ocherki o razvitii khoziaistva i byta estonskikh krest'ian v 19 i 20 veke*, Tallinn, 1978, pp. 90-125.

⁵ R. Põldmäe, 'Rahvakultuurist, eriti rahva lõbutsemisvormidest Setumaal' (*Eesti noorus*, Nos 4, 5, 1938).

⁶ Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Poetry: its Nature, Significance and Social Context*, Cambridge, 1977, p. 259.

several Estonian scholars, in particular: Veera Pino (VP) and Paul Hagu (PH), who are both specialists in Setu tradition (and themselves Setu), Vaike Sarv (VS), who has undertaken fieldwork among the Setu and has worked for many years with a Setu choir, Udo Kolk (UK), Kristi Salve (KS), and others who are too numerous to list here.

Oral poetry publications and the world of song

To what extent do the old (and often so-called ‘standard’) collections of oral poetry and song represent the entire range of a community’s oral culture that existed at the time an archived or published item was collected? As other contributors to this book have emphasized, in making use of archive or published materials we must constantly bear in mind that collection undertaken in the nineteenth-century romantic spirit, fired by Johan Gottfried Herder, emphasized specific kinds of material that were useful in the creation of specific types of poetic history and poetic landscapes.⁷ The faithful presentation of oral culture with reference to its contemporary social and functional context, untouched by the collectors’ own values, was in those days an alien concept.

The largest and the ‘standard’ collection of Setu oral poetry was compiled by Jakob Hurt (1830-1906) and published in the three-volume *Setukeste laulud* (Songs of the Setu; 1904-07). Hurt imposed on his materials a division into narrative and lyric songs, including in the latter category all songs associated with festivals. The Setu themselves knew of no such categorization and, as in so many oral cultures, felt no need of conceptualizations of this kind. In so far as they regarded one type of song as different from another, their opinion was based partly on melody and partly on content. Hurt’s method of presenting the texts on the printed page further distanced them from the mode of performance. In his preface Hurt was right to assure his readers that ‘the songs had been printed word for word and line for line just as they had been written down.’ However, this assurance overlooked the fact that the collectors had not recorded the materials during actual performance but from dictation. In this situation singers usually provided the collector with an elliptical version of the poem, stating only the bare content of each line and omitting such features as expletives, inserted syllables, and repetition. Thus a line published by Hurt as:

näiokõsõ, noorõkõsõ maidens, young ones

would have been sung in actual performance — depending on melody — as:

Lead singer:

näijoks näijokõsõ, no küll noorõ, noorõkõsõ

⁷ See chapters by Voigt, Kleut, Krnjević, Branch, Knuuttila.

maidens, maidens, oh yes youth, young ones
 Choir:
 Näijö näijö-kõsõ, vai noorõ, noorõkõsõ
 maidens, maidens, or youth, young ones

Often the melody required the insertion of extra syllables and changes to the text which are not evident from a dictated version of a song. As Ingrid Rüütel has shown, although the metrical structure of a line was most commonly the traditional Baltic-Finnish trochaic tetrameter, additional lines, filler words, repetition and syllabic division often rendered the basic line almost unrecognizable.⁸ Moreover, in addition to the informant's shortening a line in dictation, a collector did not always have enough time to note down every word even in dictation. In effect, therefore, the songs collected by this method have at least two forms: the (dictated) written form, and an oral form re-created at each performance with variations determined both by melody and by each performer's individual style. Thus caution is essential in drawing any conclusions about metre from materials which collectors published on the basis of dictation.

Caution is also necessary in reaching conclusions about the nature and variety of the song tradition on the basis of the early collections. The contents of *Setukeste laulud* are of great value in respect of the song types included in the collection. Indeed Hurt's collection has preserved for us songs which otherwise would have been lost for ever; it is, for example, particularly rich in wedding songs. Yet, on the other hand, it contains only very few examples of occasional improvisations. Important gaps in Hurt's collection are the songs performed by women at the village women's festival (*pabapraasniekka*), songs performed by men in the company of other men and, above all, the suggestive teasing and jesting songs associated with wedding ritual and full of sexual innuendo. Although we know that such songs existed, social attitudes inhibited the singers from performing them in the presence of their socially superior collectors. On the rare occasions when collectors did hear such songs, they usually felt it improper to record them, and on those very rare occasions when such songs were recorded, they were not published. Such gaps distort our understanding of the tradition as a whole, since one of the functions of the songs was precisely to permit the use of explicit sexual expression and the treatment of subjects that could not be mentioned in normal discourse.⁹

More recently, collectors in the Setu region have attempted to overcome the shortcomings of conventional face-to-face recording situations. By spending more time with their informants and even

⁸ Ingrid Rüütel, 'Die Schichten des Volkslieds der Setukesen und ihre ethno-kulturellen Hintergründe' (*Finnisch-ugrische Forschungen*, Band XLIX, Heft 1-3, 1990, p. 103).

⁹ VP, communication to the author.

participating in daily activities, collectors have succeeded in assembling far more representative collections of songs, often surpassing the collectors' own expectations. In 1958, for example, a group of fieldworkers led by Udo Kolk arrived in the village of Obinitsa at the height of a local celebration. The village menfolk invited Kolk to enter a large house nearby. Inside he found some twelve to fifteen men assembled but no women. In front of the men stood a row of liquor bottles, a saucepan, a spoon, butter and drink. In loud, thundering voices the men began to sing in chorus and continued for four hours. Interwoven with obscenities, their singing, much of it improvised, ranged over numerous topics including even politics.

On the whole, however, materials of this kind have not been collected. Again, the explanation is to be sought in social attitudes which disapproved of drinking and therefore ignored the accompanying oral culture. Consequently, the published collections are very poor in male drinking songs, similarly in songs performed by boys. While it is true that the Setu singing tradition is predominantly part of women's culture, the published collections give the impression that the male tradition was even more limited than was in fact so. But by the same measure, the collections — as indicated above — also convey a restricted picture of the scale and variety of women's songs. Many songs performed by women to other women at various celebrations represent types which most collectors have never had the opportunity of hearing. Kolk reports how a researcher at a wedding feast only happened to hear a women's song about the frequency of a couple's sexual relations once the women were thoroughly drunk:

Once, at a wedding, a researcher heard a song (the women were already drunk) about a young man and woman. The woman agrees to have intercourse with the man only once a week, whereas the man wants it once a night. The man makes himself a wife out of wood and takes it into the forest. His real wife then takes pity on him and promises to have intercourse with him more often.¹⁰

The sex of the collector also played a role in determining what kind of songs the informants were willing to perform. Women collectors found it very difficult to communicate with men, since conversation between men and women outside certain specific social situations was considered an invitation to adulterous behaviour, illustrating the attitude common in many undeveloped rural communities that contacts between a man and women who are not married to each other can only be for the purpose of sexual intercourse. As such attitudes weaken and concepts of sexual equality gain ground, the collector-informant relationship is becoming more relaxed. Nevertheless, collectors still find it easier to work with women singers for the simple reason that women are more

¹⁰ Virtanen, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

approachable. This has to be seen as yet another reason why the Setu materials available for research are so predominantly women-oriented.

In concluding this overview some observations should also be made about performance. The early collectors left very little information. In part the collectors' own culture and ideology account for this. The lack of information in old collections about the manner of performance is explained in part by the fact that a song is so ordinary and commonplace that its performance is difficult to characterize. Nor are there any absolute performance rules or conventions. Although it has sometimes be asserted that men do not usually perform women's songs in male company, it is possible to find some men who actually prefer to sing in the company of women.¹¹

The presentation of wedding poetry in the early collections, for example, gives the impression of a series of songs, each of which appears to have its own particular niche in a rigidly ordered rite. Today, however, we know that one and the same song could also be performed in various other situations in which some structural affinity existed. An illustration of this is the *hähkuslaul*, a lament-like separation song usually performed on the first day of the wedding rites as the bride left her parents' home.¹² In 1984, Vaike Sarv recorded a *hähkuslaul* performed at the singer's birthday celebration. A young man at the celebration asked the women who were present to perform a separation song despite the fact that he had so far failed to find a wife. The women sang and before long the boy and his father, who were both drunk, embraced and broke into tears, moved by the grief conveyed in the song's account of how the young woman parted from her family to start a new life in her husband's home. Sarv records that the party was still in full swing when she left at five o'clock the next morning. We should note from this account several interesting features. The wedding song was performed out of context, in the early hours of the morning and not in the evening, it was addressed not to a young woman about to marry but to a young man with marriage in mind. This incident emphasizes the fact that the performance context is not fixed but has to be assessed in the light of detailed study of the community in question.¹³

Singing: a way of life

Nowhere does the singing of oral poetry occur only in solo performance. Singing always draws its strength from social situations and from the importance placed on it by the community. In short,

¹¹ VP, communication to the author.

¹² Vaike Sarv, *Vidy setuskikh prichitanii i ikh muzykal'nye osobennosti. Muzyka v obriadakh i trudovoi deiatel'nosti finno-ugrov*, Tallinn, 1986, pp. 18-215.

¹³ The problems of ideology and perception associated with the collection and presentation of Estonian oral poetry in the nineteenth century were much the same as in Finland where collectors were principally interested in epic poetry (see chapter by Knuuttila).

singing is an integral part of the traditional way of life. In societies where the course, pace and rhythms of life are to a great extent controlled and marked by traditional means, respect for the past and its traditions are an essential feature of life. Characteristic of such societies is the unquestioning approval of the community's traditional norms and values. Gender roles, differences in wealth, upbringing, skills or social standing are accepted for what they are and are rarely perceived as socially divisive. At a very early age children learnt from their grandparents that 'the only way to live is the way people lived before'. In such societies singing served as a mode of discourse which was used for the expression of concepts and emotions for which everyday discourse was unsuitable. Veera Pino has advanced the view that in the Setu communities communication in prose and communication in song were governed by different sets of rules. This explains the clear distinction between the 'speaking' voice and the 'singing' voice and the associated social attitudes. The Setu sang loudly without inhibition or any sense of embarrassment, for singing was something that was offered to others.¹⁴ Distinctively laryngeal, the Setu 'singing' voice is very difficult to imitate and is no longer used by younger Setu singers as they adopt singing styles from outside the tradition.

Singing was an integral part of any celebration. Of all the celebrations, weddings were the most important; and among the Setu the wedding was above all the concern of the bride and the other women of the community. The role of the Setu bridegroom was so passive that the wedding could have been celebrated without him. Weddings have often been described as the most critical of the rites of passage, the moment in life at which the woman's fate is determined and the symbiosis of personal relationships is adjusted for the rest of her life. While the Setu wedding also served this purpose, it provided at the same time all the actors in the rite with a public opportunity for the expression of a wide range of emotions, opinions and various items of information that could not otherwise be communicated.

The moment in the wedding which marked the bride's separation and shift to her new home offered the opportunity to convey both praise and abuse, often of the most hideous kind. The bride might grieve as she is parted from the friends of her youth. If her behaviour has not always been beyond reproach or her virtue has been called into question, she may protest that her jewellery is of greater value than the groom's home. During the lamentation phase before the actual wedding rites, at which the groom was not present, a bride could even indicate her preference for a man of her own choice: 'Why didn't you, the one I fancied, come and propose?' were the words addressed by a bride to one of the young men present. The question had such an effect on the boy that he declared: 'I shall have you,' in consequence of which the

¹⁴ VP, communication to the author.

wedding did not go ahead. In ordinary discourse the community would not tolerate the expression of such sentiments.

The main content of the Setu wedding songs was determined by the attitudes of the bride's and groom's kin groups to the marriage. Criticism indicated dissatisfaction with the match, praise conveyed approval. On such occasions criticism was never veiled but stated forthrightly: the bride was neither slim nor beautiful but pregnant, the groom was a confirmed bachelor. Since weddings were arranged, it would be interesting to know what was the purpose of public abuse of this kind, particularly as it sometimes led to the members of the two families coming to blows while the main actors looked on.¹⁵

Aggression was long thought by anthropologists to serve as a social safety-valve. Abuse and conflict presented in the form of song was seen as a regulated and ritualized expression of suppressed aggression. The explanation of aggression as a source of energy that must by its very nature be released in one form or another must, however, be questioned. Society's attitude towards aggression is itself determined to some extent by the frequency with which people themselves experience aggressive feelings. Human relations can in fact be made more difficult if resolution of problems is sought in aggressive behaviour rather than through other, more constructive strategies.¹⁶

In Setu wedding tradition, the expression of dissatisfaction with the bride or groom has its origins in part in common social values. Despite its drawbacks, direct expression of personal criticism was tolerated because it satisfied a human need for variety and drama. Thus in the traditional Setu way of life, good and bad were expressed without inhibition.¹⁷ In the past, discourse between members of village communities was in general more direct and less inhibited than today. This can be seen, for example, in the frank depiction of physical appearance and personal behaviour. In respect of emotional matters, however, traditional 'village discourse' was less open. For this reason people resorted to veiled strategies to convey their real feelings: through proverbs and other stock expressions, or communication in a form that differed from normal speech — song.

As with other forms of Setu tradition, this particular communicative function of song survived longer among the Setu than elsewhere in Estonia. However, with the spread of industrialization, the emergence of different social expectations and the levelling influence of education and the mass media, the forms and values of traditional Setu culture came under strain. The songs began to lose their meaning as singers came to feel them to be outdated. This alienation process was also encouraged by outsiders who looked regarded the songs as simple and old-fashioned.

¹⁵ VP, communication to the author.

¹⁶ Kirsti Lagerspetz, *Aggressio ja sen tutkimus*, Helsinki, 1977, pp. 220, 300.

¹⁷ VP, communication to the author.

The recent revival of Setu women's tradition has been brought about by professional folklorists. By seeking to record the surviving songs and to collect information about their social and performance context, the folklorists validated the old tradition and restored its status. As a result, when Setu women once more began to perform the songs, they met with considerable public interest. Today, numerous choirs now actively perform the songs both through individual performance and at annual festivals for Setu song, dance and music. As in other comparable cultural revivals, monuments have also been erected in memory of the great singers of the past.

As Sarv has shown, the Setu songs now have a wholly different function. Although singing skills are no longer needed in everyday life, and the younger women and girls do not sing traditional songs (though they may be keen listeners), women in the seventies relive their youth through sentiments such as:

Ilol haari otsast kinni
leelol nopsi nilgast kinni

I grasp joy
I snatch a song from a corner¹⁸

Folk tradition as modern-day entertainment creates new situations that are totally foreign to the old way of life. Nevertheless, shorn of its central role in traditional society, the function of a folk song, both as a creator of a sense of identity and as communal entertainment, remains an interesting phenomenon and continues to pose questions for research.¹⁹

The singer's aesthetics

Debate still continues about whether the performance of an oral poem represents the composition of a new poem or is merely the attempted repetition of something old and familiar. In the minds of some scholars the concept of the oral poet creating a new poem ranks high in their scale of values, while stereotype repetition of familiar materials ranks low. The value placed by modern society on artistic originality and creativity has frequently been applied to the study of oral poetry and the choice of materials for study and criticism. Far less attention has been paid to the performers' own criteria of what constitutes creativity, skill and style, or their perception of prosodic conventions. For these reasons the Setu tradition is of particular interest, since researchers have recorded accounts by several performers of how they perceived the act of singing.

Okse Luik's comments were recorded in 1958 at the age of seventy-six as she performed a roundelay. She intended to open her performance with lines from the 'Grave-Maiden' poem but had forgotten how

¹⁸ VS, communication to the author.

¹⁹ Virtanen, op. cit., p. 173; see also chapter by Knuuttila on comparable phenomena in Finland.

it began. She explained to the collectors that she would take some 'beautiful words' from another poem so that she could be sure of giving them a 'beautiful song'. Later in the performance, as she shifted from a sleigh-making episode to the suitor's journey, she stated, 'I'll take something from another song, and that will make a beautiful song'. Luik knew full well that she was using her material out of context, and repeated the same explanation at the beginning of yet another episode, adding that her purpose was to make the song 'long and beautiful'. Luik's association of length and beauty was typical of Setu tradition: a song had to be long to gain the audience's admiration and approval.²⁰ On this particular occasion her poem ran to 205 lines and contained components of ten different epic poems. It was in fact a miniature epic compiled from a series of loosely connected episodes.²¹ A more elaborate example of this process is a 5575-line epic poem about the life, courtship and marriage of a young girl performed by one Anna Vabarna at the beginning of the century. As she improvised her poem, Vabarna drew on a common stock of clichés and employed various stylistic features from a large number of well-known poems.²²

Concepts of what constitutes the suitable length of a song vary in time and place according to local cultural conventions. The modern popular song rarely lasts longer than four minutes. In some cultures time is measured by events, while in modern urban society, dominated by timetables, time is calibrated scientifically. Among the Setu, there was clearly not a sense of time approximating to anything that we can recognize nowadays. Linked to this was the fact that singing was the principal form of entertainment and as such was regarded as an important component of life to which some degree of priority had to be given. Thus a long song — like a modern full-length film or a serialized complex family drama on television — holds the audience's attention more tightly and more profoundly.

Luik's comments during the course of her performance also illuminate her perceptions of metre, parallelism and style in general. Several times during her performance Luik turned to her thirty-five-year-old daughter for advice. Particularly important for Luik was the cultivation of 'another word'. By this she meant either a parallel line or a word or words containing alliterative elements. A song which was not composed of pairs of lines in which the second was always a parallel line and which included a relatively high frequency of alliterative components was considered 'poor'. Since the cultivation of such features is not always easy when a performer is improvising, meaningless alliterative words are sometimes invented. When asked to explain such a

²⁰ VS, communication to the author.

²¹ VP, communication to the author.

²² A.O. Väisänen, 'Setumaan "lauluemojen" tilapäisrunoja' (*Kalevalaseuran vuosikirja*, No. 3, 1923, pp. 153-83).

word, the singer may reply, 'It's a word in the song, I don't know what it means.'

The singer is also often reminded of personal memories by the song itself, which she incorporates to heighten the interest of the song. Luik, for example, included in her performance the 'pulliks Poolamaal' motif (to Poland to be a bull) in which the 'I' of the song assaults the girls like 'a wolf, the sheep, like a hawk the hens', stating: 'The cockerel was stolen from me!' (referring to an occasion in her life when a hawk carried off her cockerel). Another device used to heighten a song's interest was the inclusion of materials connected with the performance situation and recalling the singer's youth, or the time just before and after marriage, or other significant personal events. The Setu singer, Anne Orn (born 1911), for example, included a suitor fantasy in her song 'Interpret my dream'. In the song, which Orn had frequently sung to her dying mother, the singer's voice asks a handsome youth to interpret her dream about three trees, one of which will become her suitor.²³

Examination of the recent Setu materials illustrates very clearly the difference in reception by the collector who has not been brought up in the community and is unable to register the enormous number of associations and nuances. The singers themselves pay careful attention to every detail of performance including the tone of voice and the slightest lexical variation. To anyone not experienced in listening for such nuances, the performance may appear very simple.²⁴ As with memorized music in other cultures, a basic feature of the melodic accompaniment to the performance of traditional Baltic-Finnish poetry is the constant variation during performance; though operating over a limited range of notes, skilful variation produces a rich musical content.²⁵

Much of the satisfaction of the audience, which would include other singers, lay in the spotting and assessment of new elements, some of which might be quickly picked up by other singers. The introduction and reception of such elements could be a complex process. A constant tension existed between a firm respect for the thematic and structural fixity of a traditional poem and a natural curiosity in novelty. The Finnish collector, Väinö Salminen, noted that a new word or concept had a particular fascination for singers and audiences in Ingria. To illustrate this phenomenon he cited an Ingrian poem. In its traditional form a mother brings butter and milk to her daughter when she wakes her on her wedding morning; in a local variant butter and milk were replaced by coffee and buns. The amusement of the audience was heightened by the fact that they knew that the Ingrians did not drink

²³ VS, communication to the author; Virtanen, op. cit., p. 177.

²⁴ VP, communication to the author.

²⁵ Heikki Laitinen, *Nelipolviset. Tekstivihko*, Helsinki, 1979.

coffee at that time of day.²⁶ Conversely, archaic lexical items whose meaning had long been forgotten could remain in use indefinitely.

Content and meaning

Fieldwork by Estonian scholars makes it possible to attempt an analysis of the significance of the traditional songs to the performers and their reception by the audience. In what follows, my analysis addresses the question of what the song appears to have meant to the Setu singer at the actual moment of performance. A central feature of the performance is the degree of the singer's personal association and empathy with the subject of the song. The mood of the narrative is conveyed by the women singers' facial expressions. Laughing eyes and twitching mouths convey the singers' amusement and personal enjoyment as they perform a humorous song, displaying a visible empathy that would be wholly out of place in a modern choir.

Frequently, the songs are concerned with the less happy sides of life. Themes in the songs such as homelessness and distress serve as indirect discourse strategies by providing an impersonal and socially approved medium for the expression of unhappiness. When Okse Luik sang a song about an orphan, she broke into tears at the lines 'the orphan has a soft place under the bench / a warm place by the door' and wept so copiously that she had to interrupt the performance.²⁷ Thus singing and weeping provided the Setu singers with surrogate forms of expression. A widow did not feel able to tell a collector about the difficulties she faced without her husband, instead she performed a lament. One researcher reported that the rapport built up in this way could often become so strong that it was not uncommon for a singer subsequently to invite the same collector to another occasion.

Identification with the sentiments, characters or experiences of a song is highly developed among the Setu singers. A singer may emphasize how much she likes a particular episode by commenting on it to the collector ('see how beautifully it is said').²⁸ The importance placed by the singers on the collector's having a proper understanding of a poem is illustrated by an aside made by Luik to the collector as she sang the song of a sister mourning her brother as he goes off to war. In the aside she pointed out to the collector the tenderness that was implied by a particular phrase. A very recent example of experience identification is provided by a woman born in 1928 in the village of Värskä who sang a version of 'The Great Oak' poem. The girl in the song decided to climb up the oak to heaven where she was wooed by the sun and the moon. But the sun was too hot and the moon was as sharp as

²⁶ Väinö Salminen, *Suomalaisten muinaisrunojen historia*, I, Helsinki, 1934, pp. 214-15.

²⁷ UK, communication to the author.

²⁸ PH, communication to the author.

a sickle. When the girl decided to return to earth, she found that the oak tree had been broken by her mother's tears. Weeping, the singer told the collector that the song was really about her own life. She thought that she had made a good marriage, but once she discovered her mistake, it was too late to escape.

Thus one level of reality in the Setu songs is the symbolic representation of events in the performer's own life. In his 1938 description of the Setu region R. Põldmäe notes that the listeners paid very serious attention to the ideas and emotions conveyed by the songs and were visibly moved by accounts of personal crises. At this level of reality the degree of factual accuracy is irrelevant. As in folk narratives generally, meaning derives not from empirical detail but from commonly accepted metaphorical assertions which depict the commonly experienced fears, anxieties and aspirations of a particular community.

Another level of reality in the songs derives from the assumption that certain actions which would not be possible in the present were possible in the past, a phenomenon comparable to the representation in Finnish legends of miraculous occurrences as self-evident truth: people really did believe that giants existed in ancient times. As far as the present investigation is concerned, the intellectual problem of truth and fantasy exists in the mind of the investigator rather than the Setu audience. The latter were too absorbed in the power of the narrative to concern themselves with such secondary matters.

In analysing the source of the fantasy motifs in the Setu songs, it is impossible to be sure whether they are drawn from fairy-tales or from myths and beliefs, since Russian Orthodox tradition did not make the same distinction between fairy-tale and narrative as West European traditions. I should like to argue that the narrative approach to the fairy-tale and the fairy-tale-like nature of belief narratives also indicates a different ontological standpoint. To illustrate this phenomenon, let us consider the poem 'Grave-Maiden'. In the poem Peeter sows corn near the burial ground. In return for a good crop he promises to marry Kalmuneiu, the daughter of the graveyard spirit. The crop is good but Peeter fails to keep his promise and instead he woos the daughter of a rich family in Riga. As he returns home with his bride, the spirits of the burial ground take their revenge. They refuse to let him pass without a ransom: Peeter's wife. The outcome is the death of Peeter's wife and of Peeter himself. This myth poem would appear to suggest a belief in grave spirits. I would qualify this, however, by arguing that it conveys a belief that although such things could happen long ago, they could not happen now. One Estonian researcher reported that her mother believed that in the 'olden days' everything that was said would come true. A consequence of this belief was the need for people to accept responsibility for what they say and do. Thus the message conveyed in the 'Grave-Maiden' poem is that because the suitor did not take his vow seriously, he had to be punished. When the researcher's mother

commented that, 'times are different', she meant nothing more or less than that reality today is different.

Another example is 'Thomas', an epic poem comprising numerous episodes including miraculous occurrences suggestive of fairy-tale materials. A man tries to make himself a wife first from wood and then from silver and gold. Unsuccessful, he finds himself a real wife but cruelly kills her in the forest. Various death omens made the woman aware of her imminent death: tears flowed from her trinkets, wolves and bears made ready to drink her blood. The news of her murder is carried by birds to her father and brother who soon after avenge her. Pino reported recording a singer in the 1950s who had believed that the events described in 'Thomas' were a factually accurate account. The singer commented on what a terrible case it was, as if it had happened only recently, and pondered how hard it was to know what life had in store. To emphasize her point the singer told the collector of an actual murder of a wife by her husband that had happened locally. For the singer both events were equally real.²⁹ Other collectors have also emphasized the lack of distinction in this perception of 'reality' between what happens in songs, however strange the events, and what happens in real life.³⁰ One collector reports that although a song may be known to all the women in a village, perhaps two at the most will pause and try to work out the singer's deeper message and adapt it to their personal worldview. None of the other women consider it important.

The relationship between solo singer and chorus

A characteristic of the Setu song is the solo singer-chorus antiphonal style of singing which some scholars suggest is a borrowing from Russian tradition. Kolk has pointed out, however, that polyphony as practised among the Russian neighbours of the Setu is of a very different kind. Typical features of Setu singing — speech and shout imitation, undeveloped and static melody, limited harmonic range — represent a very old type of singing of which the closest corresponding form is found among the Mordvins some two thousand kilometres to the east.³¹ As such, the Setu style of singing, which also preserves many ancient Baltic-Finnish features, should be considered a separate, distinctive form of its own.³²

During the performance of their songs the women constitute a particular social group whose behaviour is conditioned by a set of conventions. Singing as the accompaniment to dance and antiphonal singing in general require organization into groups, negotiation,

²⁹ VP, communication to the author.

³⁰ KS, communication to the author.

³¹ Udo Kolk, *Setu mitmehäälsuse probleeme. Regivärss*, Tartu, 1979, pp. 100-01 [*Tartu Riikliku Ülikooli toimetised*, 501].

³² Rüütel, op. cit., pp. 119-20.

constant communication, physical proximity, all of which generate a sense of common purpose and mutual support. In practice it is difficult to undertake a strictly objective assessment of how a singing style can shape women's sense of group identity. On the one hand, not all women sing, on the other, social groups always seem to take shape however varied the circumstances may be. The choir is one such group in which every participant has her own role. The choir has a defined hierarchy and 'inner state'. According to Sarv, who worked with a Setu choir for five years, the network of human relations within the choir was complex, possibly because the women found it hard to relate easily to each other in urban conditions. Such difficulties also occurred in choirs in the villages, but there any member of the choir who could not work with the leader could easily leave and join another choir. The significance of good human relations is illustrated by the refusal of singers to perform for a collector if it involves performing with a person with whom they would not normally sing.

The role of the solo singer was crucial to the success of the group. For this reason if the solo singer failed to meet the standards required by the group, she would be expected to give up her leading position and leave. There were various criteria by which her skill was judged. She could be criticized for 'losing a song' (i.e. forgetting the melody), or for not being sufficiently skilled in the control of the *kergütämine*, which was an essential artistic device in long songs (i.e. the melody drops from half a note to two notes at the beginning or in the middle of line to avoid straining the voices of those singing the high voice role). The solo singer also had to have a powerful personality in her own right and be able to persuade the others to follow her. Agreement to perform a particular song is, in effect, an act of solidarity and approval, underlining how central and vital a role singing played in Setu life. If a singer did not approve of the songs chosen by the group because a song contains *ropud* (dirty) or *porid* (coarse) words, that person would probably leave.

The combination of solo singer and chorus provides greater scope for improvisation than unled communal singing. Different solo singers, however, have their own particular styles of performing and leading. Akuliina Pihla, for example, sang in a powerful, attractive masculine voice. She gesticulated, beat time with her foot or danced. Olga Laanetu would use her voice in various ways to achieve a particular effect. Standing motionless she would let the song seemingly swell out of herself. Whereas Pihla would amuse her listeners by performing titillating songs, Laanetu impressed hers by her tight inner control.

Some scholars have tried to categorize a singer on the basis of her repertoire. Certain personal features such as composition and combination skills, can be identified if a sufficient body of material is to hand. However, it is impossible to hypothesize or to draw conclusions about a singer's personality on the basis of written sources alone. We do

not know whether a strong-minded singer might jokingly have made all the members of her choir sing the indecent words of a particular song, or whether another singer might have discreetly distanced herself from a similar situation. Of one thing only we can be sure: each of them, if asked, would have known the words of the song.³³

It came as no surprise when Laanetu eventually gave up singing, unhappy at the direction in which the tradition was moving. Scholars are inclined to seize on such an incident and to generalize that songs of epic content were giving way to the composition of song types that were lyrical and more personal. While scholars may see a clear distinction here, that distinction was not one that was always recognized by the singers and their audiences. In the same place and at the same time, one singer may maintain the older norms, while another may cultivate more recent styles. Indeed, even the singer who believes that she is composing a new song may in fact be using traditional stock materials.³⁴ In attempting to extract some general trends from this situation, the scholar is forced to the conclusion that a methodology has not yet been developed that is capable of describing, let alone analysing, the dynamics and criteria of composition in this tradition.

Who do women sing to?

It has already been shown that songs are an important means of expressing the feelings of individual singers. In examining the social functions of such songs it is necessary to ask two questions: at whom are the performances primarily directed, and who, in fact, listens to them? To answer these questions we must first consider briefly certain differences between male and female singing in Setu communities. Normally, male and female groups sang separately. Male groups would usually sing in the presence of men; occasionally women would ask men to sing in the home or at a festival when the audience would be mixed. On the whole, however, women would not be very familiar with the themes and motifs of men's songs. The reverse was the case with women's songs whose tradition was more public.

Although women frequently sang only to women and about questions specifically of interest to women, on occasions their singing was to some extent directed at the opposite sex. Estonian songs preserve a large number of stock phrases used by women to address men. This was still common at the beginning of the century, when ring and long dances that had been forgotten elsewhere in Estonia continued to be performed in the Setu region. In the weeks after Christmas young girls would customarily gather in the evenings at a house in the village to sew or knit, to play, sing or dance. Such occasions were commonly accepted by the young people and their parents as occasions where sexual pairing could

³³ Virtanen, op. cit., p. 188.

³⁴ VS, communication to the author.

take place and all those involved behaved accordingly. Later, between Easter and Whitsun the social activity of young people centred on the swing. It was the boys' task to make a swing; the girls were expected to sing as they used the swing. Summer saw the *kirmased* (from German *Kirchmesse* 'church festival'), which took place either on a saint's day or on a day of local significance. Travelling among the Setu in 1875, M. Veske described his experiences:

I heard that the people would be gathering in the afternoon for a festival called *kirmas* at the Setu village of Meeks four versts away. There I met between eighty and a hundred women and girls who were standing in a circle and performing traditional songs and dance. The solo singer sang one line, which was then repeated by all the others present in a strong, loud voice, while two women, arm-in-arm, walked with a dance-like step round the circle until they reached the places they had left at which point another pair would repeat the movement. The song took some thirty minutes to perform.³⁵

Põldmäe describes a similar performance. According to his account the girls' beauty, their silver chains and clasps, the feeling expressed in their songs all had a powerful effect on the listeners, especially those for whom the performance was intended. After the singing had ended, the boys could be so captivated that they would each grasp a girl by the hand and swing her to and fro 'in a self-effacing ecstasy of love'. The girls' singing was frequently aimed at the young men, with the women teasing the men purely for the satisfaction of the group, ignoring any listeners altogether. The attitude of the women's menfolk to their singing was generally benign tolerance and sometimes even pride. In certain situations, men might attempt to prove their social superiority by imitating the singing of their womenfolk.

Põldmäe also reports that a Setu girl's ability to sing was customarily one of the criteria by which her merits were judged. Men knew that girls who were able to sing well would make wives who would bring joy and happiness to an otherwise humble home. A girl who possessed the 'tongue of a swallow' was not only a fine singer. The Setu also attributed other qualities to her: a good memory, self-assurance, the ability to conduct herself well in the presence of others, to display her beauty to its best as she sang, and the certainty of improving her lot in life. In those areas where the singing tradition died out, life was judged to be that much the poorer. In judging a girl's physical attraction and beauty other criteria also came into play. Particularly important to the girl herself were her trinkets, the most cherished of her personal possessions. They were also the sign that she had reached marriageable age since it was not the custom for children to wear any kind of ornamentation.

³⁵ M. Veske, *Bericht über die Ergebnisse einer Reise durch das Estenland im Sommer 1875*, Dorpat, 1877, p. 43 [*Verhandlungen der gelehrten Estnischen Gesellschaft zu Dorpat*, 8. Band].

Allusion to sexual matters took place only among members of the same gender and then only on special occasions. One such occasion was the *pabapraasniekka*, based on similar festivals in Russian tradition. The married women would contribute food and strong liquor to the celebration. As they drank, their usual reserve was abandoned and they performed sexually explicit songs and dances, frequently mocking their menfolk's sexual prowess. On occasions the women would join with revellers from other villages and it was not uncommon for fighting to break out among the drunken women, all of which their menfolk watched with great amusement. Such occasions are comparable with carnival behaviour in other cultures. The permitted seasonal reversal of normal behaviour was a means of reasserting and thereby validating the community's norms and conventions: for the rest of the year a woman's place was in the home.

As elsewhere, Setu folk songs were an integral part of a community's traditional culture and were tightly linked to gender roles. One of the reasons for the development of women's studies was the observation that many behavioural theories were more appropriate as an explanation of male behaviour rather than that of women. It is a premiss of women's studies within the humanities that women's traditional activities are not always the outcome of subordination to men but have evolved from values that have no counterpart in the male worldview. It is useful here to take into account Marja-Liisa Swantz's observations in respect of the social position of women in Tanzania. While recognizing their subordinate status, Swantz points out that in Tanzania women nevertheless take the initiative for a wide range of activities crucial to the social and mental well-being of the community (e.g. handicrafts, ritual activities and the associated song and dance). This leads her to the conclusion that it is necessary to study not only that which was denied to women, but also that in which they were expected to play the leading role.³⁶

This approach provides a frame for assessing the social function of the Setu tradition. It allows us to consider the song culture of Setu women specifically as a phenomenon reflecting the values of a woman's worldview and functioning as a medium of communication. A century ago, more than a hundred women and girls took part in a *kirmas* held in the village of Meeks. By dancing and singing together they asserted their conscious awareness of belonging to a group separate from their menfolk. Without any hint of defiance or protest, their songs depicted, quite simply, their everyday lives. These women knew nothing of a world in which the difference between the roles of men and women was perceived as a problem and in which the conscious striving for 'equality' had become a part of women's lives. Such circumstances

³⁶ Marja-Liisa Swantz, *Forskning om kvinnans ställning i utvecklingsländerna. Kvinneforskning i de humanistiske fag*, Oslo, 1979, p. 73.

present us with a paradox: although these women clearly were subordinate to their menfolk by present-day standards, they had no sense of inferiority. They possessed their own traditional culture with the right to amuse themselves as boisterously as they wished. As Sarv has shown, underlying this traditional behaviour was a vigorous sense of pride and dignity, a mental stamina which enabled them to endure the hardships of their inner and outer lives.³⁷

In conclusion it has to be said that study of the song culture of the Setu women produces a paradoxical insight. The less we know of the performance situation, the easier it is to present a clear picture of the significance of the tradition. The more we know of the infinite variety that distinguishes one performance from another and of the performers' own attitudes to their art, the greater the difficulty we face in extracting generalizations. The study of Baltic-Finnish oral poetry has long been conditioned by a nineteenth-century Romantic approach with its quest for the heroic. The tradition preserved by the Setu women forces us to see the singers as ordinary people singing about the critical issues of their everyday lives. The surviving Setu materials help us to grasp the enormously complex plurality of factors that influenced the singers and the situations in which they performed.

³⁷ VS, communication to the author.

Chapter Eighteen

The dynamics of singer and audience in contemporary Zulu praise poetry: shifts in a tradition¹

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One of the central questions for those involved in the practice or study of contemporary culture in Africa relates to the use of the past — that is, the powerful symbols and resonances within a culture which influence present consciousness. Oral art forms often have the easiest and most direct access to such symbols yet for a variety of reasons oral art, be it song, drama or poetry, has frequently been dismissed as irrelevant. The widespread and eager assumption of the supremacy of print and written communication has in many parts of Africa pushed oral art forms to the sidelines, the margins of people's consciousness, and to the margins of public and political respectability. Even the work of sensitive commentators (such as Jack Goody) on the effects of literacy on previously oral communities serves often to stress the benefits of literacy and undervalue the role of oral modes of communication.² When oral art is recognized at all, it is often seen as something to be preserved and noted down, but not something to be taken seriously, not an important channel of communication for contemporary life. As Karin Barber has pointed out, in some cases instead of listening seriously to what oral literature has to say, scholars 'have converted it into a showpiece, a text to be shown off as evidence of high traditional culture'.³ In more general terms, covert evolutionist notions of the nature of progress are often dismissive of the role of verbal art in a society. Thus the complex conventions of many verbal art forms, known and understood by performers, audience and participants alike, are often counted as nothing because those involved are not literate and not part of the dominant culture of the printed word.

¹ This chapter is a revised version of a paper written in March 1987 entitled 'A Dying Tradition? African Oral Literature in a Contemporary Context', and which subsequently appeared in the Cape Town periodical *Social Dynamics*, 12, 2, 1986, pp. 31-38.

² See, for example, Jack Goody, 'Thought and Writing', in Ernest Gellner (ed.), *Soviet and Western Anthropology*, London, 1980, pp. 119-33.

³ Karin Barber, communication to the author.

The South African evidence in this regard is in many ways no different from other parts of the continent such as Yoruba-speaking western Nigeria. Kelwyn Sole has observed, in his assessment of the emergence in South Africa in the 1980s of largely oral poetry among the black trade unions, that until recently working-class oral culture was grossly undervalued. He writes:

In my opinion, the admiration activists feel for lower-class forms of cultures is a relatively recent phenomenon. Consider the more oral, rurally-derived cultural forms used by the black migrant workforce, at present one of the largest and most militant sections of the working class. As recently as the early 1970s, many activists dismissed these forms as mere 'folklore' and 'caricature'. Therefore we get amazing statements like this one made about black cultural life in the 1970s: 'The traditional cultures had long since ceased to be capable of sustaining or developing artistic forms' (Mshengu, *South African People's Plays*, 1981, p.xiii). Now ten years later, a working class poetry based on and transforming traditional historical and praise poetry is finally becoming visible.⁴

The vitality of the poetry to which Sole refers is indeed a challenge to notions of oral art as static and caught in a timeless wheel, or indeed to the notion of oral art as high traditional art rather than a dynamic element within popular culture. However, before discussing some of this poetry in more detail, I wish to refer briefly to evidence of change and adaptability in other oral art forms elsewhere in Africa, and to examine the influence, or lack of influence, which oral art forms exert. The examples will be drawn from Nigeria and Zimbabwe.

Harold Scheub's work on Xhosa oral narrative does not deal with shifts in narrators' perspectives in response to social and political change but the work of Veronika Görög-Karady which takes examples from a number of African societies does seek out evidence of such adaptability.⁵ In one instance she takes a number of Sudanese tales which re-shape stories of man's origin in an effort to account for the inequality between black and white in the colonial period. A number of tales show the mother (the Eve figure) preferring her black offspring to her white, even to the extent of hiding him from his father. God compensates for this by giving power, knowledge and military authority to the white son. The black child is perceived as retaining the important ancestral, mythical link through his mother, but he loses power in other spheres.

⁴ Kelwyn Sole, 'Politics and Working Class Culture: a Response' (*South African Labour Bulletin*, 10, No. 7, 1985, pp. 48-49).

⁵ Harold Scheub, *The Xhosa 'ntsomi'*, Oxford, 1976; Veronika Görög-Karady, 'Retelling Genesis: the Children of Eve and the Origin of Inequality', in Veronika Görög-Karady (ed.), *Genres, Forms, Meanings: Essays in African Oral Literature*, Oxford, 1982, pp. 31-44 [*Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford*, Occasional Papers, 1]; Görög-Karady, 'Parental Preference and Racial Inequality: an Ideological Theme in African Oral Literature', in Bernth Lindfors (ed.), *Forms of Folklore in Africa: Narrative, Poetic, Gnostic, Dramatic*, Austin, London, 1977, pp. 104-34.

Görög-Karady has also discussed the evidence from a wider spread of tales which, in various ways, attempt to interpret what the individual narrator sees as inequality, or an unequal distribution of power between the races. Narratives such as those analysed by Görög-Karady and others of the Paris group of folklorists may demonstrate the capacity of oral narrative to re-structure and update itself. However, the fact remains that the bearers and communicators of tales are often regarded (and may regard themselves) as those who have been left behind, who are not modern and learned in terms of book knowledge. Such a view may be held even more strongly if the storytellers, singers and poets are seen as part of the rural peasantry and are viewed as not having access to modern ways, modern technology and 'progress'. Indeed, Barber has recently suggested in a provocative and important article that the marginalization of oral literature can be seen as part of the larger 'displacement and impoverishment of its bearers, the illiterate peasantry'.⁶ The refusal to listen to the messages of oral art forms is, she argues, a direct consequence of the political marginalization of the peasantry.

Barber's comments relate in a specific instance to her experience with Yoruba performers of praises, i.e., *oriki*. She also, though, asserts that modern Nigerian urban oral artists such as the Yoruba popular theatre performers are equally marginalized and again draws a general conclusion from this evidence. She writes:

Thus, although oral art flourishes (at least in some parts of Africa) in new forms, and perhaps has a long life ahead of it, it is not usually regarded by the ruling class as a serious reflection on the state of the nation. At best it is patronised by the Ministries and the universities.⁷

Perhaps the key question to consider as regards oral art forms (or predominantly oral forms where print plays a limited or subordinate role) is indeed whether or not they have any power, influence or leverage in contemporary culture and politics in situations where an oral poet and his audience are both perceived as sections of the marginalized and peripheralized sections of society. Clearly the specificities of culture and politics in a given situation will affect the answer greatly. In some instances popular song may move closer to the locus of power within a culture because of the pressure of history. Thus evidence from Zimbabwe provides a rather different dimension of song, contemporary experience and influence to that mentioned by Barber with reference to Yoruba *oriki*. Songs appear to have been a vital form of expression in the process of resistance, and 'conscientization', during the war of liberation. In his collection which he calls *Songs that Won*

⁶ Karin Barber, 'Yoruba *oriki* and Deconstructive Criticism' (*Research in African Literatures*, 15, 1984, p. 497).

⁷ Barber, communication to the author.

the Liberation War Alec Pongweni quotes extensively from the 'conscientization' songs sung by liberation choirs from a range of popular songs composed by artists such as Thomas Mapfumo and Oliver Mutukudzi.⁸ New concepts relating to the conduct of guerilla soldiers towards the masses during the war are present in some songs. In others, such as 'Kuyara' by Mapfumo, and 'Ndiri Bofu' by Oliver Mutukudzi and the Wagon Wheels, the stress is on dispossession and the need to turn to the ancestors and elders for advice, or to seek help from 'the Lord'.⁹ The themes of seeking help from the ancestors, or seeking inspiration from the deeds of past leaders such as the spirit medium Mbuya Nehanda, and Chaminuka, feature prominently in a number of songs. The Zimbabwean songs, which Pongweni calls 'folk poetry', show the way in which long-standing beliefs and attitudes, and new ideas, can be overlaid, and can co-exist and interconnect in a very potent way in performed art.

The songs show also how important such forms can be in creating and moulding new forms of political consciousness at a crucial period in a people's history. In the Zimbabwean case the vital role of such oral material appears to have been recognized by those at the centre of new political power after independence. Thus in the foreword to Pongweni's collection, President Banana writes:

The songs also provided the means by which political conscientisation was achieved and moral support generated among the masses ... The songs represent an interesting synthesis of our rich cultural heritage and modern melodies ... Traditional and Christian tunes were given a revolutionary dimension, and became an important means of teaching people about the struggle as well as restoring pride in our past.¹⁰

The Shona and Ndebele 'folk poetry' which is acknowledged to have played so important a role in the Zimbabwean instance has, in some cases, links with categories of traditional song, namely war songs, dance songs, beer songs and funeral songs.¹¹ However, neither Shona nor Ndebele praise poetry, which form a distinctive category in each language, appears to have been mobilized in the task of shaping consciousness during the critical war years.¹² Perhaps this was because

⁸ Alec Pongweni, *Songs that Won the Liberation War*, Harare, 1982 [hereafter Pongweni].

⁹ Ibid., pp. 94-96, 109-11.

¹⁰ Ibid.: Foreword.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. viii-ix. One of the Ndebele songs included is 'We are leaving our parents'. The same song has travelled southwards. It appears on a recording of FOSATU (Federation of South African Trade Unions) choirs which was released in 1985. The only difference is that 'South Africa' is substituted for 'Zimbabwe'.

¹² See Aaron C. Hodza, Geoffrey Fortune, *Shona Praise Poetry*, Oxford, 1979; Geoffrey Fortune, Aaron C. Hodza, 'Shona Praise Poetry' (*Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 37, 1974, pp. 65-74); Leroy Vail, Landeg White,

no deep correspondence emerged between the themes of such poetry and the urgent concerns to 'conscientize' and re-educate that the struggle for independence required. Perhaps also the right situation for praise poets and their audience simply did not exist in the flux of a long guerilla war and so the genre was not able to reconstitute itself in a new political and social context. In this respect the recent Zimbabwean use of oral art form seems to contrast somewhat with the South African situation in the 1980s. Certainly in the South African context praise poetry seemed to have developed in a way that has not happened in Zimbabwe.

Both Zulu and Xhosa praise poetry, i.e. *izibongo*, because they exploit powerful cultural symbols with such ease, appeal in a very direct way to their listeners' emotions and attitudes. Like much epic poetry, they intrinsically combine political and aesthetic appeal and perhaps for this reason they represent valuable 'property' in an ideological struggle. The usage of *izibongo* by opposing groups points up the struggle for control that is being waged at present, 'a real struggle over the symbols of the past, an ideological contest engaged in at the level of tradition'.¹³ In the case of Xhosa *izibongo*, Jeff Opland has demonstrated how *iimbongi* (praise poets) have adapted their art to suit the contingencies of the present; he has shown how both print and oral performance can now be part of a modern *iimbongi*'s mode of operation.¹⁴ The Xhosa *iimbongi* also show, in their support for opposing leaders, that the rhetorical force of their art can be used in the service of opposed ideological positions. Opland suggests that the Xhosa *iimbongi* is in an impossible position. If he protests against political events — as the *iimbongi* Mncedisi Qangule did — he may face detention and harassment; if he participates in 'controversial political events', he may be criticized by others. Opland writes: 'The modern *iimbongi* finds himself trapped between the power wielded by homeland politicians and the force of public opinion ranged against them.'¹⁵

It is, however, with the Zulu *izibongo* that the power which praise poems have to shape and to break loyalties seems most evident. This must relate to the importance of kingship in Zulu culture and history because of all the *izibongo* of chiefs and chiefly lines it is the royal praises which still have the most subtle and decisive power to move a mass audience and bring to the surface fervid protestations of loyalty to an individual and to the power he represents.¹⁶ Whereas in the past,

'The Art of Being Ruled: Ndebele Praise Poetry 1835-1971', in Landeg White, Tim Couzens (eds), *Literature and Society in South Africa*, London, 1982, pp. 41-59.

¹³ Shula Marks, communication to the author.

¹⁴ Jeff Opland, *Xhosa Oral Poetry: Aspects of a Black South African Tradition*, Cambridge, 1984, especially Chs 3 and 4.

¹⁵ Opland, 'The Isolation of the Xhosa Oral Poet', in Landeg, Couzens (eds), *Literature and Society in South Africa*, op. cit., p. 193.

¹⁶ I have discussed this phenomenon at some length in Gunner, *Ukubonga Nezibongo: Zulu Praising and Praises*, PhD thesis, University of London, 1984, 2 vols, 1, Ch. 2. I have also shown how resonances from the royal praises are used in the praises

before the demise of the Zulu Kingdom in 1882, it was usually quite clear how such loyalties were to be directed, the situation now is vastly different. There are, in the fragmented Zulu consciousness of a century later, a number of 'constituencies' that are in a position to tap into the power of the royal *izibongo*. On one level, continuity with the old line of kings still exists. The present king is a descendant of the royal house of Shaka, and the present royal bard, *orimbongi*, John Dlamini, seems in the last ten years to have established and consolidated his position as a talented performer and composer of Zulu royal praises. He has composed almost all the praises of the present king, Goodwill Zwelithini kaBhekuzulu, and he is a rousing performer of the *izibongo* of former Zulu leaders Bhekuzulu, Solomon, Dinuzulu, Cetshwayo, Mpande, Dingane and Shaka, founder of the Zulu kingdom in the early nineteenth century.¹⁷ He still has occasions on which to perform, a recent example being at the unveiling of a memorial stone for the late Princess Magogo kaDinuzulu, mother of Chief Buthelezi. He was pictured in the weekly Catholic paper, *UmAfrica*, with the caption *Imbongi yodumo lena umfokaDlamini obeqaphuza amakhosi oselwa emkhosini wokwembulwa kwetshe loMntwana uPrincess Magogo kaDinuzulu* (The famous praise-poet, the son of Dlamini, who praised the royal line at the ceremony to unveil the memorial stone for the Royal Princess Magogo, daughter of Dinuzulu).¹⁸

Besides fairly small occasions such as this, Dlamini also performs the royal praises at Shaka's Day celebrations, held in Kwa Zulu annually in September, and the occasion for the show of a distinctive, and narrow, Zulu nationalism. On these latter occasions the dynamics of poet and audience work along old, well-established lines and the praises work to re-constitute a sense of past glory and past power. Possibly a man of the undoubted talent of Dlamini is able to perform without being squeezed out in the way that Opland suggests Xhosa praise-poets are. Yet it could be said that the operational base of the Zulu *imbongi* is shrinking and that his position too is under threat. One reason for the continuing strength of royal Zulu praising, quite apart from the talent of its poets, may be the contrasting political situation between Zulu and Xhosa peoples. The Zulu monarch, and Chief Buthelezi, and the cultural-political organization, Inkatha, which he heads, have a conservative populist following far larger than any other Bantustan leader, or royalty. If the popularity of the Zulu royal family, or of Inkatha and Chief Buthelezi, were to shrink drastically in the next few decades, then

of Isaiah Shembe in Gunner, 'New Wine in Old Bottles: Imagery in the *izibongo* of the Zulu Zionist prophet, Isaiah Shembe', in Görög-Karady (ed.), *Genres, Forms, Meanings: Essays in African Oral Literature*, op. cit., pp. 99-108.

¹⁷ See Gunner, *Ukubonga Nezibongo*, op. cit., 1, Chs 3 and 8, Poem 1.

¹⁸ *UmAfrika* (3 August 1985).

the Zulu royal praise poet might face the same position as that faced by Xhosa *iimbongi* in the late 1980s.¹⁹

Yet perhaps the very adaptability of the symbolic value of the Zulu royal *izibongo* will ensure for them a different future. The Zulu royal praises, like epic, have the capacity to offer a kind of stability, and a sense of swift communication with the past; they can be used to reflect on the present in a number of ways. In some situations they might evoke conservative nostalgia for a glorious past. In others, they might seem part of a nationalistic desire to redress the balance of power; or they may be used to inspire a need for deep political change. Even the praises of the individual Zulu kings can be viewed in a different light and used in vindication of differing ideological positions. Thus the *izibongo* of King Cetshwayo, the king finally defeated by the English, were recited by a trade-union poet at a large union gathering in Durban in late 1986. In this totally new context, the praise poet is not a loyal servant of the king but a shop steward and his audience consists of fellow-workers.

What can the relevance of royal praises possibly be in such a situation? The desire for various groups to lay hold of the past is not a new phenomenon in the history of politics and culture. Thus King Cetshwayo can be seen as a symbol of the courage of the black oppressed and his praises recited with this central feature in mind. Also, in a way, this is an example of those within the trade unions laying claim to the glories of the Zulu past and tracing a new kind of continuity for it. Other groupings, too, have looked to the royal *izibongo*. Thus, besides the continued performance of the royal *izibongo* by the royal *imbongi*, presenting a position that is ambivalently ethnic and nationalist, there have been recent performances in KwaMashu, Umlazi and other townships around Durban of *izibongo* in praise of Inkatha and Chief Buthelezi and parts of Zulu royal praises have been worked into these. Their composer and performer is Mr Mbutho, a dry-cleaner's agent from KwaMashu, Durban, who was formerly a teacher, and they have been performed in KwaMashu, Umlazi and other black townships around Durban between 1981 and 1985. In this instance Mr Mbutho's audiences would have consisted of teachers and members of the black middle classes rather than workers or members of the peasantry or the rural poor.²⁰

It is in the new context of the black trade-unions that praise poetry seems to have achieved a remarkable transition which may be lasting, or transitory, and it is in the arena of trade union power rather than royal power that the new dynamics of praise poet and audience have been established. Besides reciting royal praises at a union meeting, the poet and shop steward Alfred Qabula composed a set of praises not for a

¹⁹ Keith Gottschalk, communication to the author.

²⁰ 'An Evening of Nguni Praising', an event held at the University of the Western Cape, 23 July 1985.

king but for the umbrella body of many of the black trade unions at the time, the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU). Qabula, a worker at the Dunlop factory in Durban who comes from Flagstaff in the Transkei, first composed these *izibongo* in 1983 for an Annual General Meeting of the Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union. His performance was not on the agenda but was very well received by an audience of two to three thousand. Since then the 'same' *izibongo*, changed to fit new circumstances and absorb new events in the union's history, have been performed numerous times. One such occasion was the Annual General Meeting of the Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU) at Currie's Fountain in Durban in 1984 before a crowd of four to five thousand. Throughout the performance there were interjections and climactic moments which testified to the high degree of audience participation and involvement in the poet's performance. It would seem that the polished form and rhetorical devices, both linguistic and paralinguistic, have been used by Qabula in a new situation, new in its urban emphasis and new in its ideological underpinning. The heroic ethos is still evident, as are the continuities in style with royal *izibongo*. The *izibongo* are both apostrophic and narrative. The formulaic praise names display the images that sit deeply in the minds of those who themselves actively use or are passively aware of the broad tradition of *Ukubonga*, praising. Thus the *izibongo* call FOSATU 'The Black Forest', which is also a praise name for King Cetshwayo and for the veteran Zulu Industrial and Commercial Union figure, George Champion; FOSATU is also, familiarly, 'The Hen with Wide Wings', and the organizing energy of the union working for the welfare of its members is set in the widely known praise name 'The Ant-eater that Digs Holes and Sleeps in them'. The praises relate a number of incidents at the heart of the recent history of FOSATU, or the unions attached to it. It alludes to industrial action and charts the action of leaders and ordinary members alike. To do this it frequently employs the compressed and oblique, allusive style which, in the Zulu tradition, is a key feature of the praises of both leaders and ordinary people alike. Qabula's kind of praise poetry is innovative yet it also expresses continuity. The *izibongo* are a unique tool in raising workers' consciousness of their union and its role in their lives as workers. Yet they are also quite clearly an expression of a strong and old art form with its roots deep in social and political awareness. Moreover, the *izibongo* clearly depend for their success on the close interaction of poet and audience, it is an interdependence that is as close as was the rapport between royal praise poet and regiments in the older, militaristic society of the kings.

Praise Poem to FOSATU by Alfred Qabula (lines 1-30)

You, moving forest of Africa.
When I arrived the children were all crying.

These were the workers, industrial workers,
 Discussing the problems that affect them
 in the industries they work for in Africa.
 I saw one of them consoling others,
 I saw wonders, 'cause even in his eyes the tears did flow.
 Worker, about what is that cry, 'Maye'?
 You are crying but who is harrassing you?
 Escape into that forest,
 The Black Forest that the employers saw and [they] ran for safety.
 The workers saw it too:
 'It belongs to us,' they said,
 'Let us take refuge in it
 to be safe from our hunters.'
 Deep into the forest they hid themselves
 And when they came out they were free from fear.
 You are the Hen with Wide Wings
 That protects its chicks.
 Protect us too with those sacred wings of yours
 That knoweth no discrimination.
 Protect us too that we gain wisdom.
 Militant are your sons and daughters.
 One wonders what kind of muti [medicine] you sprinkle them with.
 Sprinkle us too that we take after them and act likewise.
 FOSATU has given birth
 His sons are spread all over Africa
 Even overseas you find his sons:

FOSATU you are the lion
 that roared in Pretoria North
 With union offices everywhere ²¹

Qabula's example of reciting the praises of FOSATU has encouraged other worker-poets to emulate him, and at present union Annual General Meeting agendas frequently combine items such as: 1. Financial Report; 2. Strike Fund; 3. Praise-singer, and so on. A younger poet who has been influenced by Qabula and who came forward himself soon after seeing Qabula perform is Mi S'Dumo Hlatshwayo. His poem, 'Yavuka yagoqana imamba emnyama' (The Black Mamba Rises Coiling Up) also became well known to union audiences after Qabula's innovative use of *izibongo*. Hlatshwayo's poem is heavily influenced by the *izibongo* form and deep structure but like Qabula's *izibongo* of FOSATU the content focuses on the struggle of workers in the unions and particularly in MAWU during a strike at the Dunlop factory in Durban in November 1984. The deep structure of Hlatshwayo's poem

²¹ I am grateful to Mike Kirkwood for first sending me copies of the English version of Alfred Qabula's *izibongo* for FOSATU. The *izibongo* appeared in *FOSATU Workers News*, No. 31, August 1984, p. 12. A praise poem to the Dunlop workers, 'The Black Mamba Rises Again in Victory' by Mi S'Dumo Hlatshwayo is in *ibid.*, Nos 33-34, October-November 1984, p. 16. Both the above poems appear in two volumes, one in English and one in Zulu entitled *Black Mamba Rising* containing poems by A.T. Qabula, M. Hlatshwayo and N. Malange, Durban, 1986, pp. 9-14, 29-33, 7-14, 29-35.

with its focus on conflict and a struggle between two opposing forces is that of *izibongo*. Just as significantly, the central image of the poem, the black mamba, is a crucial one. One of King Cetshwayo's praise names is 'UMamba yeVuna'. It is also a praise name that has been used for Chief Buthelezi.²² In Hlatshwayo's praise poem, the Black Mamba as a praise name is expropriated for a new kind of leadership and a new kind of power, namely the corporate power of the workers expressed through their union, in this case, MAWU. Hlatshwayo expands and elaborates on the praise name of the Black mamba and cleverly weaves it in with another closely related praise name, *INdlondlo*, 'The Horned Piper' which, with its connotations of power and danger, is a name also associated with royalty (it is one of the best-known praise names of King Goodwill, the Zulu king).

The following passage shows the way in which Hlatshwayo is using, and in an important way laying claim to, not only the symbols of a tradition but the black tradition itself. He states, indirectly, that the past and the symbols of the past are part of the contemporary struggle being waged by workers and would-be workers. Like many of the liberation songs of Zimbabwe (and the poems of black consciousness) Hlatshwayo's poem addresses the ancestors and expresses continuity with the past through them also:

Black Mamba that shelters in war songs
Others shelter in the trees.

Our Ancestors of Africa
Be happy
Here is the swarm of workers like locusts.

Horned Viper that rose in the morning at St Anthonys
With many heads
They pointed one to Mobeni
Njakazi the young calf of MAWU
Can bear witness
They pointed one to Mobeni
Njakazi the young calf of MAWU
Can bear witness
They pointed another head to the Qulusi people at Ladysmith
And when it rose there it was like a fire.²³

²² See Gunner, op. cit., 2, pp. 53-55.

²³ From the poem 'The black mamba rose, coiled up', lines 20-24, 39-45 in the Zulu copy of *Black Mamba Rising*; author's translation:

Mamba emnyama ebhace ngamahubo
Ezinye zibhaca ngemithi

Mathongo akithi eAfrika
Nanelani
Nasi isikhonyana sabasebenzi.

Bull that I heard bellowing in the lands of the Cape
And as I was still listening I heard they were pointing to it in the Transvaal
And as I was still listening I heard they were pointing to it at
Pinetown
And as I was still listening I heard it skirting the sea shore
And then as I heard it they were pointing to it at Empangeni ...
I heard they were pointing to it at Sithebe
And even as I was listening I saw it filling up the yard at
Hundreds.²⁵

The three trade-union poets to whom I have referred are each, in their individual ways, laying claim to and using powerful cultural symbols from within Zulu, and to a lesser extent Xhosa, tradition. They show how a working-class culture can show inheritance of, rather than dispossession from, those nationalist and popular symbols so vital to a

Ndlondlo evuka ekuseni eSt Anthony's
Isimakhandakhanda
Elinye balikhomba eMobeni
UNjakazi ithole eliluhlaza leMAWU
Unokufakaza.
Elinye balikhomba kubaQulusi eMnamabithi
Lapho selivuke selingumlilo.

²⁴ Madlanyoka Ntanzu, interview with the author, 14 February 1987, Johannesburg.

²⁵ Ntanzi, communication to the author.

INkunzi engiyizwe ibhonga ezweni laseKapa
Engithe ngisalalele ngayizwa sebeyikhomba eTransvaal
Ngisalalele ngayizwa sebeyikhomba ePinetown
Ngithe ngisalalele ngayizwa igudla njalo ulwandle
Ngithe ngisalalele babeyikhomba eMpangeni. ...
Ngezwa bebeyikhomba kwaSithebe
Ngisalalela ngayibona isigcwele amageceke eHenred

people's contemporary self-image. Furthermore, each was able to use praise poetry as a means of expressing new alliances and new loyalties because audiences responded favourably and recognized the use of old poetic and dramatic conventions in a new context.

The poets also set the *izibongo* with all their evocative resonances within a new continuum. Thus they became one among a number of forms of artistic expression taken hold of, and shaped, to express the political and cultural struggle in South Africa. Neither Qabula nor Hlatshwayo composes and performs only poetry that could be defined as *izibongo* and both have devised plays as well. One of Hlatshwayo's more recent poems recited to a worker's cultural group at Clairwood, Durban, and to a large audience at an open cultural day at the University of Witwatersrand in February 1987 could by no means be termed *izibongo*. Entitled 'Koze kube nini?' (For how long?) it retains, in muted form, the same emphasis on heroic conflict and on commemoration; like the union *izibongo* it focuses on the contemporary experience of union members (in this case the violent death of four MAWU members at eMphophomeni, near Howick early in 1986) but it also links their deaths with those of others who have died — the poem implies — in a common cause. The early lines compare those who have died in the cause of justice to small streams feeding the rivers which in turn feed into the sea, and it continues:

Alas! Our struggle in South Africa
Is like the sea.
It adorns itself with the heroes and heroines of Africa.
Yesterday it kept adorning itself — with Raditsela,
With Goniwe,
With Neil Agett,
With Biko.
What can I say? The line is as long as the Thukel ²⁶

Poems such as 'Koze kube nini?' by Hlatshwayo, besides their link with the *izibongo* tradition, are also close to the performed poetry which is now so widely used in the townships and which sprang to life in the late 1960s and early 1970s with the work of Mtshali, Serot and Sepamla. As Tony Emmett remarks (having in mind particularly the younger poets who followed the above), the oral, political and communal facets of

²⁶ From the poem as recited to the author by Hlatshwayo; author's transcription and translation:

Maye! Umzabalazo wakithi eMzansi Afrika
Unjengolwandle.
Uhloba namaqhawe namaqhawekazi akithi eAfrika.
'Zolo lokhu uhlobe — ngo Raditsela,
NgoGoniwe
Ngo Neil Agett
NgoBiko.
Ngingathini? Uhlel' olude lungangoThukela

township poetry are what give it its own distinctive character and its own cultural imperatives.²⁷ These three facets are also integral elements of the performed poetry of the union *izimbongi* whether their work can be classed as *izibongo* or, more broadly *izinkondlo* (poems). Perhaps, as Mbulelo Mzamane has already argued,²⁸ it is *izibongo* which through their deep structure, namely the readiness to embrace conflict and the heroic ideal, form a key link between past and present — between the poetry performed in townships and older forms shaped in the ethos of pre-colonial societies.

The contribution of the worker poets who exploit both *izibongo* and the more broadly based urban style of the black townships is a crucial new development in contemporary black culture; it cuts through urban and rural dichotomies, and it shows workers defining their own culture. Perhaps most important of all, it shows the seductive symbols of the Zulu past, set within the rhetorical beauty and affective power of praise poetry, being lured away from an aggressive ethnic nationalism and put to the service of a wider, more egalitarian cause. In more general terms, the trade-union poets' use of orally based poetry once more challenges the notion that oral forms belong to the margins of contemporary life. These new praise poets have created a different audience for praise poetry and they have set praise poetry firmly within a new continuum. They have shown that oral forms far from being peripheral seem to hold the centre stage in the attempt to define contemporary worker consciousness in South Africa.

²⁷ Tony Emmett, 'Oral, Political and Communal Aspects of Township Poetry in the Mid-Seventies' (*English in Africa*, 6, No. 1, 1979, pp. 72-81).

²⁸ Mbulelo Mzamane, 'The Use of Traditional Forms in Black South African Literature', in White, Couzens (eds), *Literature and Society in South Africa*, op. cit., pp. 147-60.

Chapter Nineteen

Oral poetry and political dissent in Somali society: the Hurgumo series¹

SAID S. SAMATAR

If, as B.W. Andrzejewski and I.M. Lewis tell us, the Somalis are ‘a nation of Poets’² whose poetic heritage is intimately connected with the people’s daily lives, then it stands to reason that great events (especially political events) should occasion great outpourings of literary creativity. The Sayyid and his generation may have carried the tradition of polemical poetry as the medium of political debate to its highest art form, making subsequent practitioners of the genre look like tame imitators at best. But the tradition is still alive and well, to judge by the ‘Hurgumo Chain’ of poems whose origins go back to the first gloomy months of 1978 when a group of Somali oral poets, sensing their country’s lurch towards economic and political disaster (stemming from the related setbacks of the Ogaadeen War, the ensuing abortive coup and attendant drought and famine), took upon themselves to articulate the ‘nation’s ills’ through the medium of oral poetry. The result was the birth of what came to be known as the ‘Hurgumo Chain’, a series of polemical exchanges by pro- and anti-government poets in the old tradition of Somali pastoral bards.

This chapter seeks to commit these poems to writing (the first such attempt) and to analyse them in the light of the great political events which inspired their composition. To facilitate the reader’s appreciation of the poetic imagery, thematic associations and political allusions of the Hurgumo series, it should be helpful to digress briefly in order to comment on the ‘cultural breeding grounds’³ of Somali poetry.

Somali poetry and the cassette tape

On 10 June 1977, a steamingly hot and humid day, I checked into the departure terminal of the airport of the Somali capital of Mogadishu to

¹ With the permission of the editors of this book, a version of Professor Samatar’s chapter has been published as an article in *UFAHAMU (Journal of the African Activist Association)*, XVII, No. 2, 1989, pp. 31-52).

² B. W. Andrzejewski, I. M. Lewis, *Somali Poetry: an Introduction*, Oxford, 1964, p. 3.

³ Ahmad Shiikh Nabahany, communication to the author. This phrase also applies to the Somalis.

return to the United States from seven months of field research on Somali oral poetry for a doctoral thesis at an American university. During the period of my fieldwork I managed, after a seven-year Babylonian captivity in the American academy, to return to my pastoral roots and to 'go native' with my nomadic kinsmen for a sorely needed psychic re-grounding. At the airport a customs official growled at me ominously: 'Any cassette tapes to declare?' I noticed that other passengers had to answer the same insistent question about cassette tapes.

It is an open secret that all manner of contraband commodities are smuggled out of the country, often with the complicity of 'big' government men. These included the skins of a rare and vanishing species of leopard wiped out by years of indiscriminate poaching fostered by a high worldwide demand for their skins. In the face of this environment crawling with smugglers and smuggled goods, why did customs officials expend so much energy in the seizure of cassette tapes? The answer will become obvious shortly.

As it happened — and as I told the customs official — I had a boxful of tapes, seventy in all, of the anti-colonial poetry of Sayyid Mahammad 'Abdille Hasan, the Mad Mullah of British colonial history who turned out to be not only the George Washington of Somali nationalism but also the Shakespeare of their literature. The official confiscated the tapes and nearly detained me. I found his behaviour astounding, given that the poetry of Sayyid was principally composed to discredit British, Italian and Ethiopian colonialists, and to mobilize public opinion for the anti-colonial struggle. What, I wondered, could a national government find offensive or dangerously subversive about these 'innocuous' poems seventy years after their composition?

The Sayyid, it turned out (and as the airport man was anxious to explain), in his memorable diatribes against the colonial powers also targeted, for good measure, for satire and ridicule those Somalis who collaborated with the agents of colonialism. Members of the families and clans running the national government of independent Somalia were castigated in the poems as collaborating with the colonial system. The poems were therefore proscribed because their use and dissemination threatened to 're-open old wounds of tribal feud and vendetta'. Citing this as cause, the man not only deprived me of the fruits of seven months of patient labour but, more ominously, hinted that I might be physically grounded — a euphemism for being committed to the tender care of the security service. I missed the plane and spent a sleepless night in a seedy hotel on KM14, a ramshackle suburb of Mogadishu.

Next day I plotted to pull my own political strings, by placing a distress call to Dr Mahammad Aadan Sheikh, a scholar colleague and, fortunately for me, at the time chief ideologue of the ruling Somali Socialist Revolutionary Party (SSRP). Having graciously listened to my predicament, Dr Sheikh placed a scolding phone call to the censor and ordered the immediate release of the tapes — an order that was

promptly complied with. Mahammad Aadan held that a distinction had to be drawn between the scholarly use of the poetry — which he judged legitimate, indeed desirable — and its mass circulation to the public which would be inflammatory and possibly cause an outbreak of feuding within the coalition of ruling clans.

The above episode illustrates two interrelated phenomena in the national life of the Somalis: the politically and socially explosive nature of poetry on the one hand, and the increasing importance of cassette tapes as transmitters of that poetic tradition. In particular, because of their high degree of fidelity in transmitting a poetic message in a verbatim form (something the Somalis attach prime importance to), cassette tapes have become the principal vehicle for the preservation, transmission and dissemination of Somali oral poetry. Moreover, thanks to Japanese technical ingenuity, fist-sized, battery-operated tape recorders along with cassette tapes have made their way in large quantities to Somali bush country, giving Somali oral poets an unprecedented opportunity to have their texts communicated to the neighbours, to the cities and to fellow Somalis abroad in exact, faithful rendition of their composition.

*Nation of poets*⁴

Foreign students of Somali language and culture have persistently remarked, often in astonished tones, on the pervasive, sometimes sinister, influence of poetry and the poetic arts on Somali life. Typical of these observations is that of the peripatetic Richard (later Sir Richard) Burton, who visited the Somali coast and the city of Harar in 1854. Not without self-aggrandizement, he claimed to be taking the *First Footsteps in East Africa*.⁵ Despite Burton's condescending approach, he expressed respect for Somali culture:

The country teems with 'poets' ... Every man has his recognized position in literature as defined as though he had been reviewed in a century of magazines — the fine ear of this people causing them to take the greatest pleasure in harmonious sounds and poetic expressions, whereas a false quantity or prosaic phrase excites their violent indignation ... Every chief in the country must have a panegyric to be sung by his clan, and the great patronize light literature by keeping a poet.⁶

Burton's remarks have been echoed over the years by observers of the Somali cultural scene, including M. Maino, Margaret Laurence, Andrzejewski and Lewis, and John Johnson.⁷ Almost without exception,

⁴ David D. Laitin, Said S. Samatar, *Somalia: Nation in Search of a State*, Boulder, 1987, pp. 34-35.

⁵ Richard Burton, *First Footsteps in East Africa*, 2 vols, London, 1854.

⁶ Ibid., 1, p. 82.

⁷ M. Maino, *La Lingua Somala: Strumento d'insegnamento professionale*, Alexandria, 1954; Andrzejewski, Lewis, op. cit.; J. W. Johnson, *Heellooy*

these scholars speak of the Somalis as a nation of poets whose poetic heritage is intimately connected with the people's daily lives, and their assessment of the pre-eminent role of poetry in Somali life and lore has been confirmed on numerous occasions by Somali commentators, most remarkably by the late president of the Somali Republic, 'Abdirashiid 'Ali Shermaarke. Shermaarke spoke of his country's pastoral verse as 'one of the two national assets of inestimable value'.⁸ The other asset that Shermaarke judged to be of equal merit was Islam, and in placing poetry in the same category as Islam in the ranks of cherished national values, the president clearly meant to lavish the highest possible praise on his country's poetic heritage.

I have discussed elsewhere the reasons for the enduring popularity of poetry and poetic arts in Somali life.⁹ Therefore I shall limit remarks here to a few generalities of an episodic character. Andrzejewski, 'elder statesman of Somali literature', relates a revealing vignette about the supremely prestigious position that poetry occupies in Somali literary temper and tastes, to say nothing of its potent use in socio-political relations. In the late 1950s, while engaged in the study of Somali language and literature, he was confronted by a nomadic interviewee, a hoary elder who asked the foreign researcher provocatively:

You English ... You make wondrous machines: lorries, airplanes, steamships, instruments that get water spewing out of the bowels of the earth. You are undoubtedly skilful as mechanics. But as poets ... Do you have poets?!¹⁰

It is a pity that the pastoral interlocutor had not heard of Shakespeare. If he could overcome the barriers of space, language and culture, the English Bard would no doubt win many literary devotees among the Somalis. However that may be, Andrzejewski must have left some useful instruction behind, for in Somali literary circles mention is nowadays made of the great English poet Shiikh Subeer, often with a note of humour.

Yet to give the name of Shiikh Subeer to Shakespeare is significant in Somali eyes on at least three counts: first, the *sh* consonant with which Shakespeare begins alliterates with the *sh* in Shiikh — head alliteration being a central device in Somali notions of versification. Second, though to an English speaker the word Shakespeare contains just two syllables, a Somali, given his vowel-rich language, is bound to hear three syllables in Shakespeare. To a Somali therefore Shakespeare and Shiikh Subeer each consist of three syllables — two long syllables and one short

Heelleellooy: The Development of the Genre Heello in Modern Somali Poetry, Bloomington, 1974.

⁸ Somali Government publication: *The Somali Peninsula: on Imperial Motives*, London, 1962, p. v.

⁹ Samatar, *Oral Poetry and Somali Nationalism. The Case of Sayyid Mahammad 'Abdille Hasan*, Cambridge, 1982; Laitin, Samatar, op. cit., pp. 34-41.

¹⁰ Andrzejewski, various communications to the author.

(*Shiikh su beer*) in the Somali and two short syllables and a long one (*Sha kes peare*) in the English. This alternation of long and short syllables and the attendant internal rhythm which this produces suggests to a pastoralist the possibility of a poetic line in the making. As it happens, a three-to-four syllabic pattern of alternating long and short vowels constitutes an exact half line of the Somali classical form called Geeraar. I reproduce a two-line extract taken randomly from the Sayyid's Geeraar poem 'Through Time Everlasting':¹¹

Ka sa baan ka sa baan baan
Nabad saafi ahaayoo

Must I through time everlasting
Observe the peace while others are busy violating it?¹²

Thus metrically, Shakespeare and Shiikh Subeer each makes a Geeraar half line and, in combination, a full line.

Thirdly, and most important, Shiikhs, mullahs and mystics — the class of inspired mad men with which Somali society abounds — provide some of the best poets in the Somali literary traditions. To mention a few, consider the contributions to Somali poetry in this century of men like Shiikh Mahammad (the Mad Mullah), Shiikh Gabyaw (a well-known mystic), Shiikh Uways (founder of a thriving mystical/religious brotherhood) and Haaji Aadan 'Afqaloo' (Twisted Mouth); a nationalist poet who caused, through his poetic gift of the gab, endless headaches in the 1940s and 1950s to British Colonial officials in northern Somalia. In fact in Somali literary ethos the view exists that men of poetry must not only be storehouses of wisdom but also by definition a little mad, slightly touched in the brain by the poetic muse. Thus to place Shakespeare in the category of mad shiikhs (a wizard of verbal alchemy) is in Somali eyes to pay him considerable tribute.

A sketch of the Hurgumo ('Festering Wound') poems

Time and space do not permit a detailed exposition of the Hurgumo series of poems. I will therefore settle for the more modest objective of briefly sketching the structural and thematic devices that combine to make the collection a coherent, artistic whole — a series. It should be said at the outset that the Hurgumo embodies a dramatic example of what the Somalis call *silsilad* (an Arabic loan word which means chain, in this case a chain of poems), a series of political or social debates exchanged through the medium of poetry. Traditionally, this was conducted at a tribal assembly by contestant poets acting as spokesmen

¹¹ Shiikh Jaamac Cumar Ciise ('Umar 'lise), *Diiwaanki Gabayadii Sayid Maxamad Cabdulle Xasan*, Mogadishu, 1974, pp. 145-50.

¹² The long syllable in this *baan*, unlike the others, is shortened to a single mora when the poem is chanted in oral presentation.

of different clans, nowadays mainly through tape-recording, as I have mentioned earlier.

The number of poems in a given chain varies, depending on the context and the importance of the debated issues, from just two to as many as thirty. But the extent of a chain does not necessarily correspond to its quality or the nature of the issues involved. For example, the *silsilad* par excellence which Somalis consider as the 'crowning achievement'¹³ of the genre is that recorded and analysed for English readers as 'A Somali Poetic Combat' by Andrzejewski and Muuse Galaal.¹⁴ By contrast, the 1970s saw the emergence of the *deeley* chain (so named because it alliterates in the sound *d*), a meandering stewpot upwards of 150 poems by some accounts.¹⁵ To judge by the thirty or so poems of this series that I have managed to examine, it represents a disconcerting example of literary gobbledygook — an endless and artless stringing together of doggerel. For reasons of clarity, perhaps of self-interest, I am reluctant to name names as regards the contributors to this series, but anyone wishing to take a look may contact me for a sample of this artistic misfortune.

The Hurgumo consists of just seven poems, a standard size of the genre and it is refreshing to be able to say, after the melancholy reading that the *deeley* makes, that it is a collection of considerable literary merit. The average length of the seven poems is about 130 lines, which corresponds, generally, to the average length of Somali oral poems. Three of the poems are by Khaliif Shiikh Mahamuud, a gifted young Majeerteen poet whose untimely death in an ill-fated attack on a government outpost constitutes a tragic loss for Somali oral poetry. Two are by Mahamuud M. Yaasiin, a poet of the Isaaq Habar Awal sub-lineage, better known by his nickname, 'Darbaaha-Jaan' (Beelzebub's Stroke), a most fitting epithet to describe his caustic tongue. A poet of considerable talent, he worked for some time in both Radio Hargeisa and Radio Mogadishu of the Somali Republic with the Waaberi group of artists. He now lives in Saudi Arabia in self-imposed exile. The sixth poem is by 'A. 'I. Afyare, a well-known Majeerteen poet who has been a fixture in Somali poetic circles since the early 1950s. The last poem is by an anonymous poet whose ethnic affiliation can none the less be deduced by a content analysis of his poem.

To facilitate the non-Somali reader's appreciation of the argument and ethnic allusions of the poems, it should be helpful to alert him to the centrality of genealogy and genealogical relations to the corporate existence of the Somali nation. Briefly, the Somali sense of community

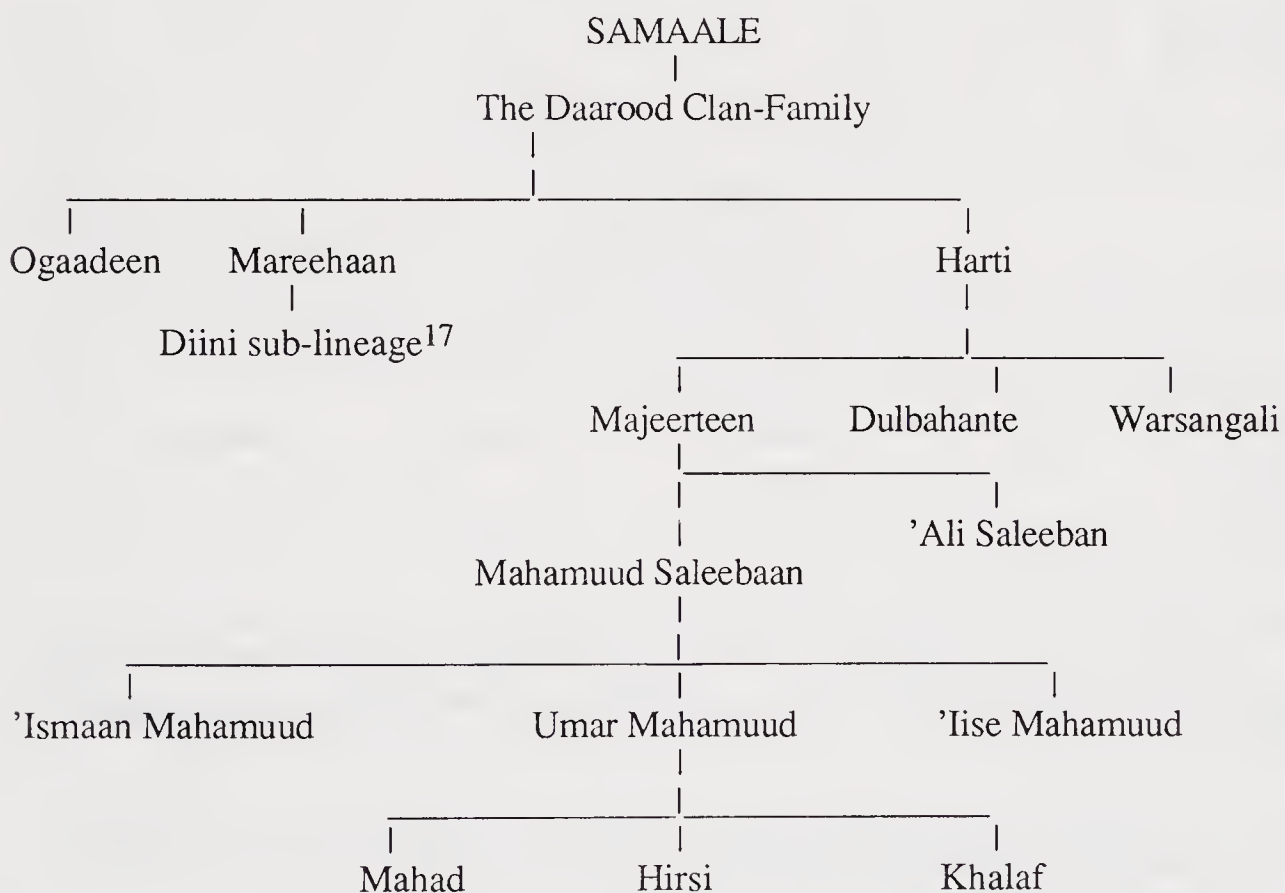
¹³ Aw Daahir Afqarshe, communication to the author.

¹⁴ Andrzejewski, Muuse I. Galaal, 'A Somali Poetic Combat' (*Journal of African Languages*, 2, 1963, pp. 15-28, 93-100, 190-205).

¹⁵ John W. Johnson, *The Politics of Poetry on the Horn of Africa: a Case Study in the Dynamics of Macro-Level and Micro-Level Tradition*, unpublished paper, Indiana University, 1987.

rests on the belief in their common descent from a common source — the mythical founding father Samaale. The nation thus consists of a vast genealogical tree of ever-expanding or dwindling segments — depending on the context — which connect one to all and all to one. One writer calls this ‘a Somali version of the Old Testament tribal segmentation of the Children of Israel’.¹⁶ In sum, genealogy in Somali society serves as a concrete embodiment of the tribal charter or constitution, defining a man’s rights and obligations in his family, a family’s in the immediate kin, the kin in the larger clan, the clan in the nation. The genealogical relations of the groups mentioned in the poems may be set down as follows (although it is essential to point out that these three charts represent only a small fragment of the total Somali genealogy (those clans mentioned in the poems):

CHART I



¹⁶ Saadia Touval, *Somali Nationalism*, Cambridge, MA, 1963, p. 16.

¹⁷ Diina: the president’s sub-clan, hence the Diini dominate the government.

CHART II

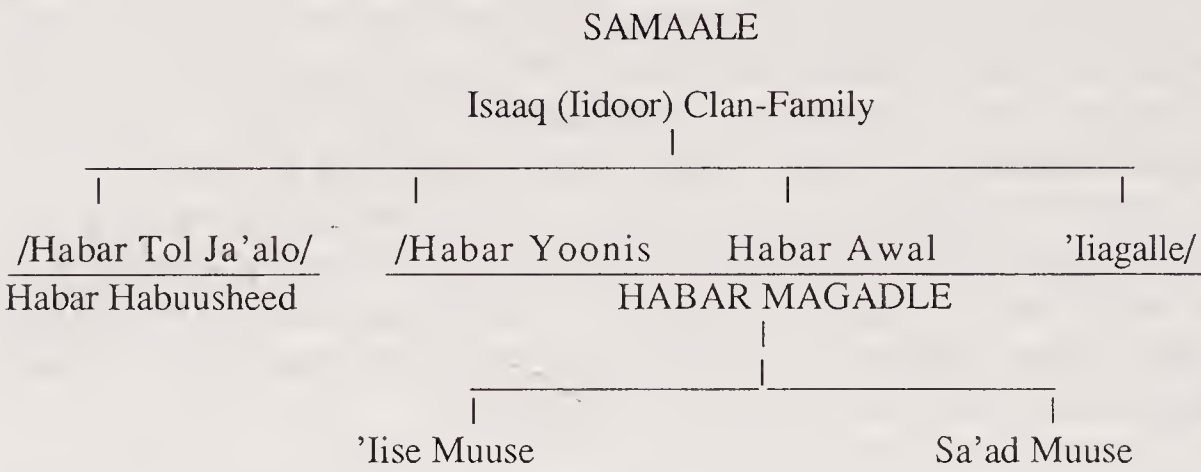
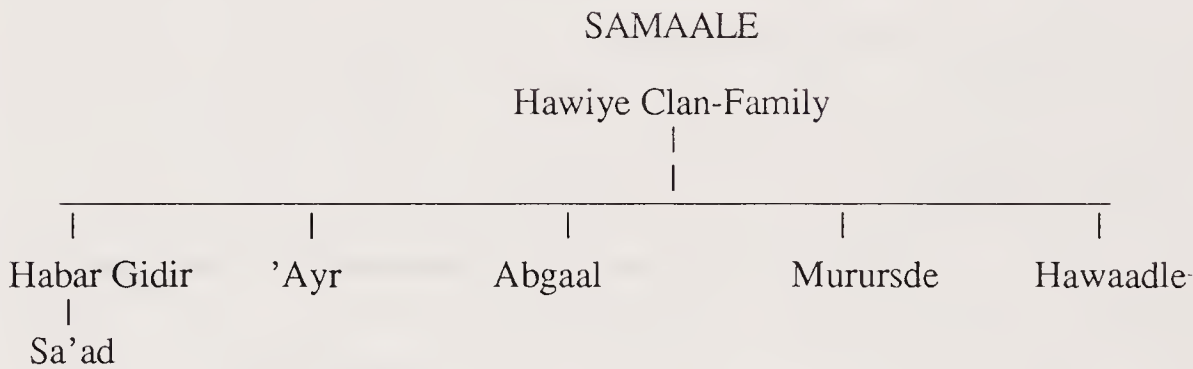


CHART III



The title word 'Festering Wound' (Hurgumo) comes from the climax line of the fourth triplet stanza of the first poem (lines 13, 14 and 15) thus:-

13.
- An infectious, festering wound has opened up inside me — full of blood and pus, threatening to snuff out my life;
14.
- Like a lone hungry lion, I must sharpen my teeth for the kill,
15.
- I have reluctantly concluded to wage a vengeful war.¹⁸

Hurgumo, an archaic pastoral term, means a bleeding wound in a person's body which will lead to an immediate death unless the patient receives speedy medical attention. The poet then proceeds to explain why he wants to wage a war in lines 16, 17 and 18:

18

13.

Mililkiyo *hurgumodii* miyaa uurka igu Miirmay

14.

Sidii aar mudi ahaa miyaan micida soofaystay

15.

Ma inaan colaad maamulay dani i moodsiisay

16. It must have pleased the Lord to make the Majeerteen the honey upon which everybody feeds,
17. They — the Majeerteen have been fed upon, as wantonly and as casually, as the wild berries of the Doo'aan Plains.¹⁹
18. The scum of the earth — every tramp wants to bite off Majeerteen flesh!²⁰

The poet goes on to give a detailed exposition of Majeerteen grievances (lines 19-57): the Majeerteen, he claims, have been ganged up on by virtually all the other clans of Somalia and mercilessly despoiled — their men wantonly machine-gunned to death, their villages burned, their property looted and their virgins subjected to an orgy of rapes. The principal villains, he charges, are the Mareehaan, who will one day pay for their excesses. Khaliif's outburst against the Mareehaan requires some elucidation. General Mahammad Siyaad Barre who seized power in a military coup in 1969 belongs to the Mareehaan clan of the Daarood clan-family. His immediate kin are the Diini sub-lineage of the Mareehaan (See Chart 1). In April 1978, after the Ogaadeen disaster, a group of disaffected army officers of predominantly Majeerteen ethnic stock, staged a *coup d'état*. The coup failed miserably. Seventeen officers implicated in the coup were summarily executed. The Majeerteen, who were outraged by the killings, rose in open revolt against the regime, establishing the opposition movement known as Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF).

This opposition group moved to Ethiopia in order to obtain arms and money with the aim of toppling Siyaad Barre from power. The move to Ethiopia — a country which most Somalis regard as a colonizer of fellow Somalis — proved to be a public relations disaster for the SSDF, for this discredited their cause as a clannish rather than a creditable national opposition. President Siyaad, having received the pretext he needed, branded the SSDF a band of self-serving malcontents and turned the full force of the army on them. Most other Somalis gave their consent to the harrying of Majeerteen.

This is the reason for Khaliif's acrimonious attack on the Mareehaan, the president's clan. Because both Majeerteen and Mareehaan start with the sound *m*, this becomes the natural consonant with which to alliterate his poem. Another feature which characterizes Khaliif's poetic style is the triplet stanza, a technique invented and powerfully employed by Sayyid M.'A. Hasan. In a triplet stanza scheme, the entire poem, say of 200 to 300 lines, is grouped into clusters of three line-stanzas. Each triplet stanza functions as an independent unit standing on its own while at the same time forming an integral part of the whole. Within the

¹⁹ Doo'aan Plains: fertile during the rainy season in Somali bush country west of the town of Garoowe.

²⁰ 16. Majeerteen Ilaah wuxu ka dhigay malab sidiisiye
 17. Sidi miraha Docaan ka baxa muudsay aadmigu e
 18. Nin waliba wuxuu mihindisaa inuu magowshaaye

triplet stanza itself, the first line introduces the central idea, the second develops it further, and the third brings it to a concluding climax. Thus the pattern is: introduction, development and conclusion:

Introduction	1.	O Abshir, ²¹ you ask me to reveal to you the meaning of my poetic lamentations;
Development	2.	My son, I am an oppressed man by day and by night;
Conclusion	3.	Behold, I keep on staggering about, like the zombie ostrich ²² of ancient times.
Introduction	4.	My head slithers about like a snake crushed by the heel of a cruel boot.
Development	5.	Yet you do not know the designs of my heart,
Conclusion	6.	To reveal them to you — I intend to take up the dagger of revenge.
Introduction	7.	The world has turned on its head.
Development	8.	Because the Mareehaan riffraff have risen to power — how puzzling the thought!
Conclusion	9.	I will meet their odious oppression head on. I intend to fight back. ²³

Khaliif continues to pour out his jeremiads over the fate of his Majeerteen clan, much like the Old Testament prophet's lamentations over the disasters of the ancient Israelites. He indicts all the clans who, he claims, assisted Siyaad Barre in the decimation of the Majeerteen. He denounces the Ogaadeen as simple country folk who cannot see beyond the end of their nose, let alone Siyaad Barre's manipulative designs. He reserves the harshest indictment for the Dulbahante who, though genealogically closer to the Majeerteen (see chart), have chosen to side with the regime out of narrow political interests.

²¹ In Somali pastoral sanctions of versification, a poet addresses his poem to a confidant, often a memorizer who takes responsibility for memorizing, preserving and disseminating the poem. In the Dervish struggle the role of the confidant became institutionalized in the person of Huseen Dikle whose main office was to memorize his master's (the Sayyid's) poetry and pass it on to others. Since Khaliif S. Mahamuud does not identify which of the prominent Majeerteen figures he was referring to by that name, we are left only with a conjecture. Some think that Hasan Faarah Abshir, one-time defector and now the mayor of Mogadishu, is the Abshir in question.

²² This denotes an evil ostrich in Somali folklore condemned to wander restless and endure continuing hardship because of its refusal to co-operate with other tribal ostriches.

²³ 1. Abshirow micnaha gabay hadaad mid iga waydiiso
 2. Wiilyohow madluun baan ahaa maalin iyo layle
 3. Intaas waan mugleeyahay sidii goroyodi i muun e
 4. Mas la dilay sidiisaan madaxa meerinahayaaye
 5. Sidaydana waxaan maaganahay waa wax kaa maqane
 6. Magliga daabo maahee si kale hay malaynninna e
 7. Aduunyadan maraabaysayoo murugtay oo xiintay
 8. Oo uu Mareexaan u kacay waa mashkila wayn e
 9. Gardarradan mutuxan waa dagaal waxan ka miistaay e

So far the poet has been limiting his poetic diatribes to his fellow Daaroods. He is a Daarood, after all, as are the other clans who have been the target of his vitriolic abuse. At this point, however, he jumps from pan-Daarood politics to pan-Somali politics by directing his bitter satire at the Hawiye, the Isaaq and others. This attack on the Isaaq draws a vehement retort from one of their number, Mr Beelzebub's Stroke, mentioned earlier. He introduces his poetic response with a revealing Somali proverb: 'He who beats out provocative drumbeats in the darkness of the night invites trouble'.

Mr Beelzebub takes up the challenge by choosing to alliterate his poem with the sound *m*, as his opponent had done. Stylistically, he does not follow the triplet stanza which makes his poem more difficult to handle. Where the triadic scheme of the Majeerteen poet powerfully appeals to the hearts and minds of his listeners, the Isaaq overwhelms his opponent by the sheer force of his brutal verbs. To put it differently, the Majeerteen moves his hearers to tears by the seductive, almost hypnotic effects of his gracious, delicate, plaintive tones; the Isaaq pulverizes them by his hard-hitting style which strikes with the power of a sledge hammer.

Mr Beelzebub meticulously refutes every point made by his opponent, pulling no punches in doing so. In particular, he charges the Majeerteen with three cardinal sins. First it is, he declares, the corrupt practices of the Majeerteen-dominated civilian governments — which preceded the military regime — that led Somalia on the road to disaster, by paving the way to Siyaad Barre's military dictatorship: the improbable triumph of the Mareehaan, he opines, was due to habitual Majeerteen folly:

Many a time I've pleaded with you Majeerteens to cool it,
 and to share power responsibly with other clans,
 By day and by night I have tried to safeguard your interests,
 But recidivist swindlers and congenitally corrupt men,
 like you, never come to their senses,
 Only Black-headed Majeerteens enjoyed an equality of
 Opportunity under your government, to the
 exclusion of others.²⁴

Secondly, the Majeerteens, he claims, have committed a Somali version of hubris, the sin of overweening pride that makes a man believe that he is not a mere ordinary mortal but superhuman. Ismaa'iil Mire, a Dulbahante poet of the 1920s, describes this kind of arrogant pride in his famous poem 'O Men, Pride Goes Before a Fall'.²⁵

24 U miyiri wax badan waanigii maandhow kula haaye,
 Waanigii maslaxadiina waday malin iyo layl e,
 Musuqmaasuq ruuxii bartaan waana kaa maqal e,
 Waydinkii intii madax-madaw simay Majeerteen e

25 Andrzejewski, Lewis, op. cit., pp. 105-10.

You Majeerteens used to boast of a huge warrior force — a
million strong,
You even thought of yourselves as powerful as the
swashbuckling Americans,
Who has cut up your muscles? How is it that your power
has suddenly vanished without a trace?²⁶

Thirdly, worse — far worse — he declares, on the day of ultimate test when the Somali nation faced the combined forces of the Abyssinians and the Warsaw Pact, when the very existence of the Somali nation was at stake, the Majeerteen showed their true colours by siding with the enemy of the nation:

When we faced in battle the black colonialists and
their Moscow allies,
The day when the Warsaw Pact covered our skies with
screaming Migs, and our seas with destroyers,
From the port of Berbera to the town of Haadaame²⁷
when the battle raged on,
When the soil cried out: where are my sons whom
I've nourished with milk?
When even those opposed to the regime responded to
the patriotic call,
On that day of test — you sided with the enemy of the
nation, forming a fifth column among us,
In guerrilla raids you destroyed our war supplies
and harassed our supply lines,
In short, you've revealed your true nature — a nature
of perfidious traitors.²⁸

In sum, he concludes, whatever the Majeerteen suffered, they deserved.

The Isaaq is especially effective in his savage mockery of the Majeerteen poet whom he repeatedly ridicules, even as he neatly refutes each point made by him. To sharpen the heightened dramatic effects induced by this scheme of point-counter-point verbal duelling, it is useful to cite a sample exchange, juxtaposing a charge by the Majeerteen

26 Waydinkii malyuumaadka badan sheegtay mirihiise,
Waydinkii is-moodmoodi jiray sida Maraykaan e,
Durba yaa mataana ku jaray kuguna maansooday?

27 Berbera: on the Red Sea coast near the Gulf of Aden. The town of Haadame, deep in eastern Ethiopia, represents the outer limits of the lands under Ethiopian rule and claimed by the Somalis.

28 Gumaysiga madaw iyo markaan Moosko diriraynay,
Markay Waarso miiggii cirkiyo keentay minawaarka,
Marsadii Barbara iyo illaa marinka Haadaam e,
Ayaa maali jirayey markii ciiddu morugootay,
Nin waloo mucaardi markuu dan u muraaqooday,
Waydinkii cadaawihi nimiray gees la soo maraye,
Waydinkii mashiinnada gubiyo marixi noo yiil e,
Waydinkii masaakiinta iyo laayey maatada e,
Asalkiinu meeshuu ahaa waydinkaa maraye.

poet against the Isaaq's response. Khaliif S. Mahamuud, poet spokesman of the Majeerteen, holds forth thus:

The Iidoor are crazed by the narcotic effects of the
 qaat plant,²⁹
 As long as they have their hot broth with which to
 wash down the hangover from the qaat,
 They will remain too drugged to bother with the principles
 and privileges of government.³⁰

To appreciate the caustic poignancy of the satiric allusions in this versicle, a touch of cultural elucidation is in order. Though most urban Somalis indulged in the consumption of the stimulant qaat plant until its ban by the government in 1984, the Isaaq, especially in the northern cities of Hargeisa, Bur'oo and Berbera, had a reputation as voracious chewers of this herb. From the viewpoint of the urban Isaaq, the consumption of qaat represented an agreeable social pastime; from that of others, however, it constituted a paralysing national addiction. The Majeerteen poet depicts the Isaaq as a people mired in the morass of collective addiction, 'crazed' in his words 'by the narcotic effects of the qaat plant'. Scurrying as they do, he declares, from 'high' (*marqaana*) to 'hangover' (*qaadira*), the Isaaq are, to borrow an Americanism, 'too strung out on herb' to 'bother with the principles and privileges of government', let alone to defend their economic and political rights against the corrosive incursions of the Mareehaan upstarts.

This inspires Mr Beelzebub, Isaaq poet spokesman, into his sharpest mocking retort yet in these lines:

65. Always brainless and abusive, you display the true
 attributes of your tribe,
66. Drugged on qaat or not, the Iidoor (Isaaq) are far
 superior to you,
67. The Isaaq, unlike you, do not stoop so low as to
 ally themselves with colonial infidels.
68. They, unlike you, never sold the Somali lands under
 alien flag for narrow political interests,
69. And however pressing their grievances, the Isaaq,
 unlike you Majeerteens, do not seek servile
 protection under lowborn Abyssinians.³¹

²⁹ The qaat plant (*Catha edulis*), also chaat, is a stimulant to which many urban Somalis and Hararis are addicted. Because of its debilitating effects the Somali Government declared it a prohibited drug in 1984.

30	37. Iidoor marduuf qaada helay 38. Hilib maraqla iyo roodhigay 39. Macna dowladnimo leedahaba	waa majnuun falan e miirsanahayaan e umma muraadaan e
31	65. Macna male aduunyada ninkii 66. Maskaxumada iyo caydu waa 67. Iidoor marduuf qaada helay 68. Intay sharafti mayraan kufriga 69. Calankii maqnaa iyo dhulkii	muran la joogaaye merediinii e kaa martaba roon e uma miciinaan e saynka may marin e

Mr Beelzebub's strategy, brilliantly successful in my view, is to shift the terms of debate from such 'trivial' matters as the consumption of a 'harmless stimulant' to the graver issues of land, liberty and national sovereignty — all of which he accuses the Majeerteen of having betrayed. The charge, at the time of the poem's composition, would have stuck in Somali eyes, because of the SSDF (Majeerteen) opposition's defection to Ethiopia.

In a counter-retort Khaliif S. Mahamuud powerfully — and passionately — defends his people against the catalogue of sins imputed to them by the Isaaq poet. This in turn prompts Mr Beelzebub to compose a second poetic response in which he unleashes a withering attack on the new points raised in the Majeerteen's second poem. At this point, when each poet has, in Somali parlance, 'fired off two rounds' (*laba gaafood geystay*), the literary fray is joined by the two new poets mentioned earlier. The result is the Hurgumo chain of poems, the complete analysis of which would be more suited to the subject of a book rather than the constrained space of this chapter.

The dynamics of urban/pastoral relations

As I have discussed elsewhere, the backbone of the Somali nomadic economy is the Somali camel, that ever-patient and reliable animal whose plentiful uses never fail the Somalis in their harsh environment. It is therefore no wonder that camel idiom pervades the language of urban Somalis, the majority of whom migrated to the cities in the great urbanization process which began in the 1930s. Consider these two paragraphs, for example, taken from an earlier description in another work:

The lyricist of popular music ... compares his tender feeling toward his beloved to a camel for her young: 'I am afflicted with the trauma of frustrated love,' he complains, 'as a camel whose baby has been unjustly separated from her.' For her part, the woman singer reminds her lover that the way 'to get plenty of milk from her is to give her lush pastures, and to caress her gently on the nipples.' In the heat of sarcasm and bitterness, the jealous husband admonishes his unfaithful wife: 'It is only camels that enjoy being milked by two men at the same time, and even then, not in all seasons but solely when they are in full lactation. Anything else of the feminine kind shared by two men,' he moralizes, 'soon loses its lustre.'

Similarly, camel vocabulary has made its inroads into business and bureaucratic language, and its usage indicates how town Somalis draw on the language of their forebears to face the demands of city life. The urban man of means and sophistication says, 'I groan for your sentiment' (*Hadalkaagii waan u guuxay*) when he wishes to acknowledge the importance of something being said. The word *guux* denotes the sound a thirsty camel — or one joining her baby — makes. The word used to identify the fleet of government limousines — *gaadiid* — in the nomadic context signifies burden-bearing camels. In modern education, students speak of *laylis* to describe exercises in a school

workbook, a word that for the pastoralists means the breaking of a young camel. Perhaps the most colourful use of camel imagery in today's bureaucratic language is *warfin* (express mail delivery), which in pastoral nomenclature describes the act of slinging a rock at a crow to keep it from pecking the wounded hump of a camel. For their part, modern researchers employ the word *raadraa'* (to investigate a problem), which in pastoral vocabulary means to trace lost animals or to track down stock thieves. To judge by the creative use that Somali Marxists have made of the word *hugaanka*, the pastoral idiom has made a similar impact on the language of revolutionary politics. *Hugaan* is a nomadic term referring to a kind of rope used for leading a camel. The word is nowadays employed to describe the Bureau of Ideology (*Hugaanka Ideolojiyada*) of the ruling socialist party.³²

These remarks should not leave the impression, however, that cultural borrowing is a single-directional process in which the town always takes from the countryside. Far from it. The urban influence on the pastoral is just as pervasive, maybe more so. Not only does a steady stream of urban commodities — motor cars, electronic gadgets, all manner of food stuffs — make its way to the bush but urban habits of mind have also profoundly affected the pastoral world.

Perhaps the best way to illustrate this is to relate two telling vignettes. Travelling in 1977, in the Somali pastoral wilderness in a Toyota truck, I noticed the driver had on the dashboard three protective charms — a Koran, an ostrich eggshell and a picture of the American actress Marilyn Monroe. As two Somalis the driver and I did not need to enlighten each other on the meaning of the Koran and the ostrich eggshell: the Koran signified spiritual protection, the eggshell a fertility symbol, one of the few pre-Islamic Cushitic pagan practices to survive Islamic puritanism in the wake of the Somalis' mass conversion to Islam. Both of us understood clearly what these two items stood for. What I was not sure of was what Marilyn Monroe was doing in the Somali nomadic wilderness. 'Who is this?' I asked, pointing to the picture.

To impress me with his sophistication, he chose to reply in Italian, as Italophone Somalis are wont to do when they mean to affect cosmopolitan airs. Said he, 'E' attrice Americana.' I discovered, by and by, that she was his favourite pin-up and, in a manner of speaking, his most efficacious protective charm. The Koran, an ostrich egg shell and Marilyn Monroe — all objects of worship by a Somali bush truck-driver! Lest Americans be tempted to think of this as proof of their singular influence over the world, they should be reminded that one of the most highly paid professional models in America happens to be a Somali girl with nomadic forebears, named Iman.³³ And when I see —

³² Laitin, Samatar, op. cit., pp. 25, 27.

³³ In addition to modelling, Iman has tried her hand at acting with her début as the black South African wife of the British Diplomat 'Castle' in the dramatized version of Graham Greene's *The Human Factor*, and in Isak Dinesen's *Out of Africa* as the Somali mistress of the troubled British pioneer.

as I often do — American youngsters gawking affectionately at posters of Iman, as they wait for the next train in New York and Newark suburbs, I cannot help wondering whether they have any idea of the origins of the object of their admiration. What this suggests is not only a mutual influence of Somali urban/pastoral relations but an ongoing, universal cross-cultural fertilization, with far-reaching implications for the oral traditions of non-literate societies.

The other vignette, which is the more germane to the immediate topic of this chapter, comes from passages of the Hurgumo poems. Normally in Somali pastoral sanctions, an oral poet is expected to include a boast section in his poem wherein he tries to overawe his poetic opponent through his language. Traditionally the metaphor for this grandiloquent, boastful language had been borrowed from the power of the natural elements. Thus in his famous poem 'The Scourge of Infidels', the Sayyid boasts in this manner:

Say: these, my four lines betoken the potency of my
poetic ways ...

Say: they strike with the force of gale winds and the
clouds of rain,

Say: they are the fury of floods and the hurricane
sweeping by ever so closely,

Say: they are the quaking sea, the raging waves and the
roaring rapids of Eyle.³⁴

Hurricane, floods, quaking sea — these are indeed terrifying forces possessed with powers at once ferocious, impersonal and unpredictable. But during the Ethio-Somali war of 1977-78, with the Russians on the Ethiopian side, the Somalis had to bear the full brunt of the Soviet military juggernaut. They were subjected to a massive and relentless land and aerial bombardment against which they found themselves defenceless. They felt, helplessly, the lethal effects of Stalin organs, T-55 tanks, Mig 23s and helicopter gunships. They saw, with horror, a bright day turned to pitch darkness in minutes under thick clouds of smoke from bursting shells. Then Somali oral poets came to appreciate that there are man-made terrors infinitely more terrible than the terrors of nature. This inspired them to draw on these man-made terrors for the imagery of their boast poetry. Khaliif S. Mahamuud on the terrible revenge his Majeerteen clan would take upon enemy clans when the Majeerteen regain power threatened:

We will come sweeping the land with flying machines
and speedy armoured cars,

We will come with fury and indignation clearly
marked on our faces,

³⁴ Cited in Samatar, *Oral Poetry and Somali Nationalism*, op. cit., p. 190. Eyle: a watering village on the coast of the Indian Ocean south of Baargaal in eastern Somalia, where the waves are particularly treacherous.

O God, who will pacify the terrors we are bound to
unleash on that day!³⁵

To his Isaaq nemesis Khaliif goes on to posit this challenge:

If you think you have mastered the poetic craft,
That you are flying the Mig fighter of poetry and
flying verbal machines.
To my mind, you are no more than a pretentious upstart.³⁶

To which the Isaaq responds:

I have deployed these four lines in a rapid-speed
fashion, like thunder and lightning,
Not straying from the straight path of the letter m
upon which I set out to alliterate my work,
Let me now haul off rivers of poetry as by the power
of a Mig-fighter.³⁷

And this:

If you had the skill to deploy your poetry as
tactfully as a high marshal taking command of the battlefield,
You would not have gone thrashing about into the
bushes like a dazed animal ...
And when I trained my heavy literary guns on them,
the Majeerteen have scattered three sheets to the wind.³⁸

In another poem the poet Isaaq accuses the Majeerteen of an ill-founded, overweening pride. He ridicules him thus: 'You who used to show off with false authority / claiming to be as technically capable as the Israelis!' To which the Majeerteen poet responds: 'With their steely muscle my clan will rise up to obtain victory / We Majeerteens intend to grow as powerful as the Americans'.

'To grow as powerful as the Americans' — quite a goal the poet aspires to on behalf of his clan. To judge from these examples, one dare predict that, in view of the publicity given to the accidental Iraqi attack

35 Annagoo makiinada laliyo moodhar ku ordayna,
 Oo caradu naga muuqataan mowqafkii imane
 Eebow waxaan maagannahay yaa maslixi doona

The last triplet of Khaliif's first poem in the series.

36 Hadaad mooday miinlayda gabay inaad ka meelgaadhay,
 Oo aad makiinada lailyo miiga Kicinaysid,
 Malahayga iigama duwanid muusannaw kacaye

The fourth triplet stanza of Khaliif's second poem, the answer to the Isaaq.

37 Afartaas sidii mayey onkoday mayska daba miisay,
 Miinkaan gaga bilaabiyo miyaan marinki waydaarshay...
 Wabiyadaan ka soo miisan jiray miig makaga keenay.

Lines 26-30 of Mr Beelzebub's first poem.

38 Lines 40-42 of the Isaaq's second poem in the series.

on the U.S.S. Stark, we will soon be hearing a Somali oral poet boasting that he will launch a sneak verbal attack on his poetic rival, as undetectable and as deadly as an Exocet missile. Then French engineers will be able to take satisfaction from the fact that their technical virtuosity may well become the object of praise songs by adoring Somali oral poets!

The Hurgumo poets, for their part, demonstrate something about the character and social context of Somali poetry generally. They reveal, in particular, the dynamic, wildly experimental and ever-evolving nature of Somali poetry while at the same time it remains fixed in a stable traditional framework, for example, in metre, alliteration and other distinguishing characteristics. Its metaphor and subject-matter change with changing social circumstances, though its inherent structure is slow to change. More than this, poetry for the Somalis serves, as again the Hurgumo case illustrates, as a social barometer reflecting the thoughts and actions, the realities and fantasies, the aspirations and fears of the Somalis. As the Somalis feel, so do their oral poets sing. It is for this reason that Somali poetry may, in a small way, be of some value in casting light on the South-East European experience.

EPILOGUE

Albert Bates Lord: In Memoriam
15 September 1912 - 29 July 1991

John Miles Foley

Perhaps there could be no more fitting tribute to Albert Lord's brilliant, pioneering scholarship and truly international influence than the fact that on the same day — indeed the very same mail delivery — there arrived two requests for *In Memoriam* notices for him: one from the School of Slavonic and East European Studies at the University of London and the other from the Zemaljski muzej Bosne i Hercegovine in Sarajevo, Yugoslavia. I know of no academic of our time who has had such a revolutionary impact on so many different disciplines — literary studies, folklore, anthropology, linguistics, history, philosophy — or on so many language areas: to denominate only ancient, medieval and modern Greek, all of the Slav languages, all of the medieval European vernaculars, the indigenous tongues of Africa and the Americas, and the languages of the Bible is to be highly selective of the more than one hundred areas affected by his work.

For most scholars Lord's legacy lies principally or even exclusively in the comparative method he established to analyse and interpret the world of 'oral literature'. Venturing well beyond the work undertaken by his mentor, Milman Parry, he offered specialists in widely disparate fields the opportunity for a new and unified perspective, a way to move beyond the customary categories of author, text, standard edition, and the like to a vision of verbal art that exists in and is nourished by an oral tradition. Each semester I have the privilege of watching students' faces light up as they ponder — not without a fair amount of 'culture shock' — the implications of rooting the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, for example, not in the well-built sinecure of Western literary history and criticism but at least partially in the quite recently discovered foundations of an unwritten, traditional heritage. For them, and for the myriad of scholars who have felt the same intellectual spark, Albert's vision continues to open avenues of understanding otherwise unavailable to the academic traveller.

The occasion of the London symposium on 'The Study of Oral Tradition and the South Slavs', and now this publication of its

proceedings, offers the chance to emphasize another, less generally visible facet of his career and overall contribution. Whereas Parry's interest in the South Slav oral epic tradition was first and foremost as a comparative analogue for his studies of the Homeric poems — to 'prove' Homer's oral traditional origins by experimentation in the living laboratory of Yugoslavia in the 1930s, Lord's commitment to the *junačke pjesme* of the *guslari* was as much to that tradition in its own right and on its own terms as for any comparative purposes. We need recall only the great care he lavished on the Serbo-Croat songs in his chapters on formula, theme and song in *The Singer of Tales* (1960), or his translation of Avdo Medjedović's magisterial *Wedding of Smailagić Meho* (1974), or the full partnership accorded the *guslar* throughout his recently published collection of essays, *Epic Singers and Oral Tradition* (1991).¹ As someone fortunate enough to spend two postdoctoral years working with Albert at the Parry Collection at Harvard, I can vouch for the centrality of the South Slav epic in his thinking; he characteristically reasoned outward from the art of the living singer, and undertook the second stage of comparison only after he had settled all matters internal to that tradition to his satisfaction.

Pages written in memoriam also present the opportunity to remark personal qualities that, from a vantage point necessarily reached only after such a loss, seem inextricable from a person's academic identity. Over and over again during the months since Albert's death — both orally and in writing — people have commented in various ways on his simple kindness, and I can think of no more fundamental, determinative aspect of his approach to people and to scholarship. No matter how charged the debate, no matter how acrimonious the attack on his work, Albert's natural dignity and respect for other human beings always marked his response. This is most certainly not to say that he gave up easily, or ever: anyone who knew him also knew what it meant to face solid criticism, albeit with a hand generously extended. His students and younger colleagues were most immediately the beneficiaries of this extraordinary kindness, which always brought with it genuine interest in and encouragement for their work, as well as the best example I can imagine of what it is today fashionable to call a 'role model'. One simply could not ignore the steadfast and absolutely selfless devotion of a person so eminent in his area; to put it proverbially, at age seventy-eight Albert was still pushing the boundaries of the field he had co-fathered.

It may be appropriate to close by observing, in particular reference to this volume and the symposium it memorializes, that Albert Lord was in fact a kind of twentieth-century Vuk Stefanović Karadžić. Both were people of enormous talent combined with singular commitment; both

¹ For a fuller account of Lord's scholarly career and a complete bibliography of his writings, see the obituary notice in the *Journal of American Folklore*, No. 105 (1992), pp. 57-65.

were collectors and editors of South Slav traditions who brought the *narodne pjesme* to the attention of the international scholarly community; both were what we might call ‘literary anthropologists’ who saw no conflict between the elegance of philology and the hands-on fieldwork involved in folklore studies. In dealing with the sense of loss we all feel now that Albert has passed on (or *svijet mijenijo*, ‘changed worlds’, as the tradition that he loved so well puts it), we may point with pride to his accomplishments — to the field he co-created and to the legions of scholars and students he permanently affected. And though we mourn his departure, we remember his Anglo-Saxon *lof*, his Homeric *kleos*, and not least his South Slav *slava*.

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